

**Feb. 21 - 27, 2025**

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## SESSION STATUS

At 1:06 p.m. on Wednesday, February 5, 2025, the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 17, 2025, at 12:00 p.m., unless sooner recalled by the Speaker.

At 12:33 p.m. on Wednesday, February 5, 2025, the Senate recessed until Monday, March 24, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. unless sooner recalled by the President Pro Tempore.

## UPCOMING SESSION DAYS

### House

March 17-19, 24-26  
April 7-9, 22-24  
May 5-7, 12-14  
June 2-4, 9-11, 16-18, 23-27, 30  
Sept. 22-24 (NV), 29-30  
Oct. 1, 6-8, 27-29  
Nov. 17-19  
Dec. 8-10 (NV), 15-17

### Senate

March 24-26, 31  
April 1-2  
May 5-7, 12-13  
June 2-4, 9-11, 23-30

*The Education Recap is a comprehensive weekly report on legislative and executive actions on education-related legislation in Pennsylvania state government, as compiled and edited by PLS. Additional information, including video, transcript and testimony, is available to [PLSGovTrac](https://www.pslgovtrac.com) users. For more information, contact [sales@mypls.com](mailto:sales@mypls.com).*

## Press Conferences

*PLS coverage of Capitol events including press conferences, bill signings and media availabilities*

### **GOV. SHAPIRO ADDRESSES FEDERAL FUNDING FREEZE**

By Dominic Kenny, Pennsylvania Legislative Services | February 24, 2025

Gov. Josh Shapiro provided an update on his lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's freeze of federal funding and its impact on Pennsylvania in the Governor's Reception Room today.

Following a directive issued by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on January 27, 2025, the Shapiro administration filed a lawsuit seeking to restore roughly \$2.1 billion in federal funds to Pennsylvania. Gov. Shapiro began by calling the Trump administration's freezing of these funds "illegal." He noted the funds were meant to help Pennsylvanians by means such as preventing sinkholes, plugging abandoned wells leaking toxic chemicals and reducing energy costs for homeowners. "Today, I'm here to provide an update on where things stand with that litigation," he said. "Every dollar that we identified at the filing of our lawsuit is currently unfrozen and accessible to all Pennsylvania state agencies." He said critical programs and infrastructure projects once jeopardized by the funding freeze will now be resumed.

Gov. Shapiro stressed that legal action was not his first choice. He said his administration actively engaged with federal partners, including U.S. Sen. Dave McCormick and the Trump administration, to unfreeze the funds. He noted that despite those efforts and multiple court orders, billions of dollars owed to Pennsylvania remained tied up weeks later. "That is why we sought and received delegation from the Office of the Attorney General to represent my office and affected state agencies in this litigation," he said. He emphasized the constitutional commitment of the federal government to disburse agreed-upon funding. "To put it simply, a deal is a deal," he said.

Gov. Shapiro discussed his continued discussions with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Trump administration following the lawsuit. He said he raised the issue of the frozen funding to President Donald Trump's senior team and members of his cabinet during his visit to the White House on Friday. "As a result of that direct engagement last week, our funding is unfrozen," he said. "They are now following the law, and we will continue to press our case." He said state agencies may resume the important work that they do for Pennsylvania's citizens. He noted that several ongoing projects in the western part of the commonwealth were forced to stop work as a result of the freeze. "These folks can now get back on the job knowing that I will continue to have their backs as governor," he said.

The press conference opened to questions from the media.

### **Were the funds unfrozen because of the discussions with the Trump administration or the litigation?**

Gov. Shapiro emphasized that the funds were unfrozen due to his conversations with top Trump administration officials. He also mentioned his legal team's discussions with DOJ.

### **Are there any unidentified funds in your lawsuit that Pennsylvania is still not receiving?**

Gov. Shapiro said his team identified all frozen funds. He stressed that if any further frozen funds existed, they would have been added to the lawsuit.

**Can you describe the conversations you had with President Trump and your fellow governors?**

Gov. Shapiro said he would not go into any specifics regarding those conversations. He stressed the importance of privacy in direct discussions. “I can tell you that I was very direct with them,” he said. “They were very responsive to me, and as a result, Pennsylvania now has what is duly owed to us.”

**What is your level of concern regarding the Trump administration?**

Gov. Shapiro said he was not going to discuss that topic today.

**What was it like working with Attorney General Dave Sunday on this issue?**

Gov. Shapiro said that he and Attorney General Sunday work well together. He said that seeking and receiving delegation is something that the Office of General Counsel does with the Office of the Attorney General every day.

**In light of the shooting at UPMC Memorial Hospital in York on Saturday, are you able to speak on the state of security in our medical facilities?**

“We saw the worst of humanity with the shooter's conduct,” Gov. Shapiro said. “But we also saw the best of humanity.” He praised the response of health care workers and law enforcement during the tragedy. He said his heart breaks for Officer Andrew Duarte and his family. He discussed his conversations with the grieving family and praised Officer Duarte’s bravery. He noted that he has actively engaged with UPMC president Leslie Davis and others who work at the hospital. He said he offered to fill any needs for security, noting that the hospital has not asked for any assistance at this time. He mentioned that UPMC had a police force already in the hospital at the time of the shooting and commended them for their work.



**DEMOCRATS, ADVOCATES URGE CONGRESS TO DEFEND U.S. ED, FEDERAL FUNDING**

By Kyle Purchase, Pennsylvania Legislative Services

Senate and House Democrats joined education advocates in the Senate Democratic Caucus Room in the Capitol today to call on federal lawmakers to protect the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the funding and support ED provides to Pennsylvania.

Sen. Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia), minority chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee, provided updates on the votes made by U.S. Congress last night. He explained how the cuts could affect certain individuals and said, “While we try to make progress there, we see progress being taken back from what we use to call partners at the federal level.” He criticized Congressional Republicans for voting to “eliminate \$2.8 billion coming to Pennsylvania students.” He further stated, “We ask them to change their mind, to go against what they decided last night.” He called the situation “unacceptable.”

Sen. Lindsey Williams (D-Allegheny), minority chairman, Senate Education Committee, regarded the federal government’s actions as “chaotic,” and criticized “President Musk for pillaging the Department of Education to find money to make him and his tech-bro billionaire friends richer.” She emphasized the importance of the rights of education and ED’s role in the “enforcement” of those rights, saying, “When you get rid of the department, you get rid of the enforcement of that right.” She criticized the nomination of Linda McMahon as Education Secretary by referring to a constituent of her who described her saying, “She has zero qualifications, but can be seen in the middle of a wrestling ring hitting someone in the face with a garbage can, shame on anyone who would vote for her.” She further criticized Project 2025 and the actions of Jeffrey Yass and stated she will “continue to call out the billionaires and corporations who want to make money off our kids.”

Susan Spicka, executive director, Education Voters PA, discussed her experiences visiting schools throughout the commonwealth and noted challenges schools face including balancing budgets and inflation. She echoed the sentiments of schoolteachers and directors who see federal cuts as “catastrophic.” She also talked about Title I funding, explaining who and what the funding supports. She noted what could happen if federal cuts were to be made to such funding, including “higher property taxes” and cuts to services. She said, “We need our members of Congress to actually support the communities they were elected to represent and protect every single dollar of federal funding that we are receiving now.”

Sen. Judy Schwank (D-Berks) said, “I don’t believe that folks fully grasp yet what proposed federal cuts could mean for our schools.” She warned about Pennsylvanians “feeling this impact.” She called for “honesty” about how and what federal funding supports and said eliminating ED is “not the answer to any of our problems.” She agreed with Spicka and said, “If our Republican colleagues in Washington D.C. go through with this, I think we’re going to have to look at increasing school property taxes.”

Sen. Art Haywood (D-Allegheny) noted his constituents were concerned with the federal government’s actions and had calls “flooding” his office. He criticized the executive orders as the “Rule of Trump, not the rule of law.” He praised and emphasized the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and noted it is still permitted. He pointed out Title VI is “intended to protect students from a hostile environment.”

Sen. Tim Kearney (D-Delaware) echoed sentiments to focus on who would be “affected by the potential cuts.” He referred to testimony given by Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Acting Secretary Dr. Carrie Rowe and how cuts would affect PDE. He criticized the Trump administration and said, “That’s where we find ourselves once more, with trying to deal with what this administration is trying to literally take away from us and shove down our throats all at the same time.”

Rep. Regina Young (D-Philadelphia) acknowledged the House was in the middle of budget hearings, but voiced support with the Senate Democrats in their support for public education funding. She encouraged advocacy and said, “We will not go silently away saying we wish we could have, and we will not stand for injustices especially as it comes to our babies.”

Priyanka Reyes-Kaura, policy director, Children First, talked about her previous visits to Harrisburg with other advocates and thanked lawmakers “working across the aisle” to “fully fund” education. She encouraged Congress to “learn from what’s going on here at the state level and work across the aisle a little bit better.” She agreed with sentiments made by Sec. Rowe and said the federal cuts would be “catastrophic” and included effects of Title I funding being cut, specifically the “dire teacher shortage” and efforts towards providing full-day Kindergarten in the commonwealth.

Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D-Montgomery) discussed schools in her “interesting” senatorial district and praised school districts in Norristown that “operate on a shoestring budget” where there are students who attended the national competition for robotics. She said federal cuts would prevent those students from opportunities including her daughter. She said she wants her daughter to attend those schools because she “believes in them and believes in fully funding the schools.” She argued, “We are losing the best and brightest minds out there.” She criticized President Donald Trump’s slogan of “America First,” by pointing out the federal cuts but noted the opportunity to “cure cancer in America,” or “having the best tech inventions in America.” She echoed Sen. Williams’ comments and stated, “We will not go down quietly, and we will get louder and louder and louder.”

Sen. Patty Kim (D-Dauphin) described actions at the federal level as a “mudslide.” She feared “a lot of people are going to get hurt.” She referred to those who voted for President Trump as “bamboozled.” She praised Sen. Cappelletti’s compassion and referred to President Trump as “flippy,” further stating, “President Trump has done this before – he said something, he reversed it.” She joined in “sounding the alarm of more taxes,” but said that “we do not want to do that for families who are already struggling with their pocketbooks.”

Jeff Coyne, director of government and political affairs, American Federation of Teachers PA, said his organization is telling their members in Harrisburg and D.C. to “fight and stand up for this.” He discussed his experiences as a Title I director in another state and explained the funding affects rural school districts. He urged people to call their “most likely Republican” Congressperson in the rural areas and said the “next fight is the U.S. Senate.” He warned of the “mudslide” Sen. Kim spoke about.

Sen. Hughes provided numbers that explained what services and programs would be cut. He criticized Congressional Republicans and reiterated the sentiments of Sec. Rowe about the effects of the cuts. He provided the phone numbers to encourage people to call their Congress person and said to “look for the Republicans, those are the ones who voted last night.” He further stated, “If Republicans continue with what they did last night, it’s almost a guarantee that local property taxes will be increased and they will bear the brunt and responsibility for it.”

Also in attendance were Reps. Anthony Bellmon (D-Philadelphia), Ben Waxman (D-Philadelphia) and Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia).



## Committee News

*Comprehensive coverage of the House & Senate public hearings and voting meetings*

### **House Democratic Policy Committee**

*02/21/2025, 12:00 p.m., Room G-50, Irvis Office Building  
Pennsylvania Legislative Services*

The committee held a public hearing entitled “Solving the Childcare Crisis.”

Rep. Justin Fleming (D-Dauphin) opened the committee meeting focused on addressing the “childcare crisis,” mentioning he would act as chairman in place of Chairman Ryan Bizzarro (D-Erie) and acknowledging a concurrent House Appropriations Committee meeting. Rep. Fleming emphasized the critical nature of childcare for economic reasons and described the current state as a crisis in staffing and access. He expressed his goal for the hearing to explore the depth of the problem and potential legislative solutions, introducing the first panel of testifiers.

Marief Campbell, administrator, Makayla’s Place Child Development Academy, discussed the economic challenges facing providers, including high operational costs and the impact on quality of care. She highlighted the importance of childcare for families and businesses and called for policy changes to raise caregiver wages, improve benefits, make subsidies more accessible and increase funding for operational costs.

Lisa Whitworth, director, Little Learners’ Child Development Center, Inc., shared the challenges faced since COVID-19, including decreased support from state agencies and inconsistent policy enforcement. She emphasized the need for clear and consistent policies for the safety and well-being of children and staff and called for more support from state agencies.

Rep. Fleming thanked Whitworth for her concerns and mentioned the Office of Child Development and Early Learning’s (OCDEL) information to help smooth out their relationship. He asked Campbell about the most impactful state policy change to ease the life of a childcare director, noting the differences in the environment pre and post-COVID. Campbell noted the significant difference in team commitment and quality of care before and after COVID-19, expressing a desire for competitive wages for her team.

Rep. Fleming mentioned Governor Josh Shapiro’s proposal of \$55 million for childcare recruitment and retention grants and an additional \$15 million for a rate increase for pre-K counts childcare teachers, expressing hope these amounts would be included in the final budget and emphasizing his advocacy for early learning. Whitworth shared her journey from aspiring to be a middle school teacher to running a daycare, emphasizing the importance of caring for and listening to children. She described children as “empty shells” and highlighted the fulfillment she has found in childcare over the past 26 years. Campbell discussed the significant mental burden parents face without quality childcare, linking the lack of options to job loss and substance abuse among parents. She shared her personal connection to childcare through her mother and emphasized her commitment to providing love and support to children.

Rep. Paul Takac (D-Centre) highlighted the challenges childcare workers in Centre County face, including the affordability of childcare for themselves. He mentioned efforts to address these issues, such as tripling the childcare tax credit in Pennsylvania and fostering public-private partnerships, and asked for feedback on these measures. Campbell stated that initiatives like the increased childcare tax credit and state grants are making a difference for childcare centers, allowing them to sustain despite financial struggles. She acknowledged the closures of many centers and expressed gratitude for the support that helps them survive. Whitworth emphasized the drastic changes faced by the childcare industry since COVID-19, mentioning the need for more support but being unsure of the specific type needed. She discussed the challenges of managing costs and raising tuition, suggesting a broader need for support in the childcare sector.

Rep. Maureen Madden (D-Monroe), chairman, House Aging & Older Adult Services Committee, expressed concern over inconsistent childcare policies and the lack of clear guidelines, especially in the context of COVID-19. She highlighted the need for a more understanding approach towards childcare providers and asked for suggestions on improving support and recognition for their efforts. Whitworth shared her experiences with regulatory challenges at her childcare center, including an incident where a child was injured leading to a stressful investigation. She described feeling unsupported by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and expressed a desire for a better relationship with DHS, highlighting issues with staff and staffing shortages affecting both her industry and DHS. Whitworth concluded by expressing a wish for improved communication and support from DHS.

Rep. Nikki Rivera (D-Lancaster) shared her experiences as a mother and former teacher, discussing the value and challenges of quality childcare and the issue of unfunded mandates in education, asking if similar challenges exist in childcare regarding increasing demands without corresponding funding increases. Campbell confirmed that unfunded mandates are a significant stressor in childcare, citing policy changes after a tragic fire incident that financially impacted providers. Campbell described a pressured environment where support from representatives and agents has become less forthcoming due to liability concerns. Campbell acknowledged the presence of unfunded mandates in childcare, noting they overburden administrators and employees with minor

tasks that don't necessarily improve care quality or children's safety. Whitworth agreed with concerns about unrealistic mandates in childcare, emphasizing the importance of teaching children problem-solving skills and expressing disappointment in the harsh judgment of childcare centers for not strictly adhering to certain policies.

Rep. Rivera asked if having internal guidelines to present to DHS before citations are issued would be beneficial in the childcare field. Whitworth shared her experiences with regulatory challenges, highlighting the importance of having a voice in policy discussions and recounting a positive relationship with a regulator that allowed for dialogue and understanding, contrasting with rigid enforcement of rules.

Jen DeBell, executive director, Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children, discussed the organization's mission, the underfunding of childcare and the staffing crisis driven by low wages, citing the financial struggles of childcare workers in Pennsylvania. She praised Gov. Shapiro's proposed \$55 million investment but advocated for more funding, mentioning public support for increased funding for childcare teachers.

Rep. Fleming asked DeBell about the effectiveness of employee benefit programs, like the one proposed by Rep. Liz Hanbidge (D-Montgomery), which involves employers matching a percentage of childcare costs to help employees afford childcare. He inquired if such programs have been successful in other states and could help bridge the salary gap in childcare centers. DeBell noted the proposal could help individual businesses and acknowledged the House previously passing the tax credit set to go into effect in the 2025 tax year. She said the concern focused on a statewide solution.

Rep. Madden emphasized the need for stabilizing funds for childcare and paying childcare workers fair wages, referencing Hubert Humphrey's quote about the government's moral test and the importance of caring for children. She asked about the fair and living wage for childcare workers. DeBell stated that the fair wage for childcare teachers should be comparable to what kindergarten teachers earn, noting the salary disparity despite similar qualifications. She stressed the importance of valuing early childhood education as much as K-12 education.

Rep. Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz (D-Berks) summarized the main issues discussed, including the cost of childcare, wages, lack of benefits and DHS policies. She suggested forming a task force to address these issues, highlighted the unfair pay scales and proposed local collaborations for food production as solutions to increased food costs and the elimination of food services in some childcare centers. DeBell mentioned initiatives in 18 states focused on recruitment and retention, including investments in wage scales, and highlighted New Mexico's significant investments in childcare.

Rep. Fleming asked about the potential impact on childcare funding in the event of federal budget cuts by the Trump administration. DeBell explained that federal budget cuts could have a "devastating" impact on childcare funding in Pennsylvania, noting that 69% of childcare funding comes from the federal government, totaling about \$957 million, and supports 89,000 children in the childcare subsidy program, over 6,000 licensed childcare programs, and quality improvement initiatives.

Rep. Fleming concluded the hearing, thanking all the testifiers and expressing hope in avoiding the potential harm of federal budget cuts on childcare.



## House Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with PDE

02/24/2025, 10:00 a.m., House Floor, Main Capitol

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Department of Education.

The Department of Education (PDE) was represented by:

- Dr. Carrie Rowe, Acting Secretary of Education, PDE,
- Lynette Kuhn, Deputy Secretary for Postsecondary and Higher Education, PDE,
- Shante' Brown, Deputy Secretary for Child Development and Early Learning, PDE, and
- Jessica Sites, Director, Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management, PDE.

Chairman Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia) announced the continuation of budget hearings with PDE, detailing the day's schedule.

Minority Chairman James Struzzi (R-Indiana) acknowledged the recent tragedy in York County. He emphasized the significance of PDE's budget, highlighting it as the second largest in the state. He outlined the proposed budget increase of \$905 million.

Sec. Rowe introduced herself and her colleagues, expressing anticipation for the committee's questions.

Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny) asked for an update on the Universal School Breakfast Program and inquired why universal school meals were not included in the governor's budget proposal. Sec. Rowe highlighted the success of the governor's universal free breakfast program, serving 90 million school breakfast meals last year. She noted that 64% of students in the commonwealth are eligible for free or reduced meals.

Rep. Kinkead discussed the issue of means testing for school meals and the 14% increase in homelessness among students in 2023. She asked how PDE could better support schools in addressing the needs of homeless students. Sec. Rowe discussed the reliance on federal funding to support homeless students and the efforts of dedicated professionals across Pennsylvania.

Rep. Torren Ecker (R-Adams) inquired about the budget, focusing on the basic education funding and the regular block grant. He detailed the governor's proposal of an additional \$526 million, or a 64% increase, and questioned whether this funding increase is sufficient to close the adequacy gap highlighted by the Basic Education Funding Commission and the related lawsuit. Sec. Rowe replied, "Yes." Rep. Ecker noted his understanding that there is still about \$350 billion in funding needed, asking if that is correct. Sec. Rowe agreed.

Rep. Ecker questioned the absence of future funding allocations to close the basic education funding adequacy gap. Sec. Rowe confirmed the budget does not account for future allocations. Rep. Ecker further inquired why the current budget does not address the funding gap as indicated by the court. Sec. Rowe explained that the General Assembly ultimately decides on budget allocations, with the governor proposing initial figures. Rep. Ecker stressed the importance of transparency and honest budgeting to address the funding gap, emphasizing discussions on using the Rainy-Day Fund. Sec. Rowe agreed on the necessity of discussions to address the funding gap. Rep. Ecker highlighted the need for transparency in budgeting across all departments, criticizing the practice of claiming level-funded budgets when increases are anticipated.

Rep. Regina Young (D-Philadelphia) discussed the teacher shortage in schools serving predominantly students of color and low-income backgrounds, describing programs like Teach for America that help fill this gap. She asked what PDE is doing to support such organizations. Sec. Rowe stated that PDE focuses on transparency, data sharing and efforts to attract and prepare a diverse workforce to support teacher recruitment and retention. Rep. Young inquired about the department's past successful recruitment activities and future strategies. Sec. Rowe highlighted a successful initiative that created a pathway for certifying special education teachers in 18 months, which graduated its first cohort in December. Rep. Young asked if these initiatives include individuals from programs like Teach for America. Sec. Rowe responded affirmatively to this question.

Rep. Marci Mustello (R-Butler) discussed the discrepancies showing no correlation between more funding and improved test scores from a recent Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) report. She asked about specific examples where making a higher investment is showing better test results. Sec. Rowe explained that increased funding does not directly correlate to higher test scores, but underfunding can lead to lower scores. She noted that additional funding could help with staffing, reducing class sizes, and improving school environments. Rep. Mustello asked if additional funding would be directed more toward rural or urban areas. Sec. Rowe responded that adequacy funding benefits all schools, especially those in greatest need.

Rep. Mustello inquired about data on student achievement excluding chronically absent students. Sec. Rowe emphasized identifying the causes of absenteeism and highlighted a successful initiative in the Butler Area School District that allows students to earn dual credit at Butler County Community College. Rep. Mustello suggested expanding this program statewide and educating

superintendents on additional opportunities. Sec. Rowe discussed the importance of examining the best practices and tax-related issues and agreed to implement a plan related to educational practices and student engagement. Rep. Mustello asked about holding parents accountable for student truancy. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of considering the extent to which the problem is within parental control and suggested a differentiated approach based on different efforts.

Rep. Paul Friel (D-Chester) highlighted the challenges of balancing the budget with increasing school costs, including payments to charter schools and transportation. He noted a decrease in state funding for all schools from 54% in 2005 to 35% currently. He asked for thoughts on addressing cost drivers to balance out the budget. Sec. Rowe discussed strategies to reduce costs, such as realigning bus routes and considering outsourcing. Rep. Friel questioned the effectiveness of minor efficiencies in significantly reducing transportation costs, highlighting the real cost drivers like the increased number of schools and growing special education needs. Sec. Rowe recognized the desire to get the best together to consider making the formula more efficient similar to the cyber formula.

Rep. Friel asked about PDE's advice to school districts on planning multi-year budgets in light of adequacy budget targets, emphasizing the need for predictability. Sec. Rowe agreed on the necessity of predictability and stability for school districts, highlighting the importance of changes made to the basic education funding base year and ongoing commitments.

Rep. Marla Brown (R-Lawrence) highlighted a budget increase of \$641 million across various educational grants but pointed out that increases vary with some rural districts that see minimal benefits. She asked what could be said to those districts. Sec. Rowe responded that the funding would allocate resources to the neediest districts according to the formula, acknowledging the challenges but noting potential benefits from other funding areas.

Rep. Brown mentioned the addition of \$826 million for the Ready to Learn block grants last year and asked about the most common uses for these grants. Sec. Rowe stated that the grants have commonly been used for academic performance improvements, including curriculum adjustments and transitioning to full-day kindergarten, made possible through historic funding and legislative support. Rep. Brown inquired about the balance between efficiency and accountability in educational funding. Sec. Rowe stated that while the direction of funding allocation is appropriate, further calibration is needed. She affirmed that the funds have been well-utilized by school districts.

Rep. Aerion Abney (D-Allegheny) discussed a performance-based audit of five cyber charter schools, revealing a 144% increase in fund balance reserves. He highlighted the governor's proposed \$8,000 flat rate for cyber charter school students. He asked for initial reactions to the audit and potential reforms. Sec. Rowe expressed concern over the audit's findings and mentioned Governor Josh Shapiro's reform ideas, including a transfer subsidy and the proposed tuition rate to help reduce cyber schools' large fund balances and provide relief to traditional school districts.

Rep. Abney recalled a study being done to find the non-academic barriers to students getting into career and technical education (CTE) programs. He wondered if Sec. Rowe knew of any challenges for students on waitlists. Sec. Rowe discussed the challenges faced by CTE programs, including high demand and insufficient space. She detailed efforts to relocate some CTE programs to districts with available space. She highlighted a visit to Wallenpaupack, suggesting it as a model for other districts.

Rep. Thomas Kutz (R-Cumberland) expressed concerns about the inadequacy of education funding for rapidly growing districts in Cumberland County. He highlighted the issue of funding not keeping pace with population growth and leading to higher property taxes. He asked about the role of population growth in future funding decisions and why growing districts like those in Cumberland County are not receiving more funds. Sec. Rowe explained that the current funding formulas are designed to treat all school districts equally based on the same metrics, acknowledging that this might seem unfair to rapidly growing districts. She stated that no new projects have been funded through PlanCon since 2017. She pointed out recent increases in funding to the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) for facilities, which have supported projects addressing health and safety issues in schools. Rep. Kutz expressed concerns about the adequacy of funding for a district that transitioned from rural to suburban. He highlighted a significant adequacy gap of \$24 million not being addressed by state funding. He questioned the fairness of a 1.6% funding increase for the district, given its needs. Sites discussed two new formulas, adequacy and tax equity, passed with bipartisan support in July. She explained that the adequacy formula consists of two parts: an adequacy gap piece based on a per-student amount outlined in Act 55 of 2024, and a local effort component. Rep. Kutz stated he was familiar with the two new formulas and appreciated the explanation but asked for a commitment to having more conversations on this issue going forward.

Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) highlighted his background as a product of public school and representing parts of Philadelphia. He noted the statewide adequacy gap of approximately \$4.5 billion, with Philadelphia County facing about \$1.25 billion of that gap. He asked about the impact of last year's funding on the adequacy gap and whether efforts are sufficient to meet needs in a timely manner, especially in schools that need it most. Sec. Rowe explained that the increase in funding has allowed school districts to hire more staff to address the social and emotional needs of students and expand special education programs. She also noted the expansion of dual-credit programs and moving to full-day kindergarten options.

Rep. Khan discussed the evolution of charter schools in Philadelphia, highlighting the shift in budget allocation and the need for reform. He referred to Governor Shapiro's proposed \$8,000 cap for charter schools. He cited an auditor general's report indicating that five charter schools have accumulated close to a billion dollars in revenues for building purchases. Sec. Rowe emphasized the need for reform in charter and cyber charter schools. She detailed the governor's budget proposals, which included a change in cyber tuition for special education students expected to save \$95 million and a proposed tuition cap expected to save \$378 million. She noted these measures will help reallocate funds into school districts' budgets.

Rep. Charity Grimm Krupa (R-Fayette) commended the governor's initiative to review every program in the commonwealth to eliminate inefficiencies, known as remapping. She asked Sec. Rowe if she had been part of the review discussions about PDE. Sec. Rowe responded, "Absolutely." Rep. Krupa asked about any plans to review the department. Sec. Rowe outlined PDE's review of its personnel and operations, noting no need for personnel cuts, significant savings from moving to a building owned by the commonwealth and the successful consolidation of space within the new building. Rep. Krupa inquired how the governor's proposed remap program differs from the internal reviews already being conducted. Sec. Rowe stated that the efforts discussed are part of the process of seeking efficiencies. Rep. Krupa commented that the new initiative seems to be a continuation of existing practices, and asked about additional steps in the investigative process of the remap initiative. Sec. Rowe explained that PDE is examining all aspects, including location, personnel and programs, to enhance efficiency. Rep. Krupa asked if there was any written plan for what aspects of PDE would be reviewed in the remapping process. Sites explained that remap is a pilot program involving three specific agencies, with continuous discussions with the Governor's Office about improving efficiency and potential legislative changes to optimize funding allocations.

Rep. Steven Malagari (D-Montgomery) highlighted the governor's budget allocation of \$125 million for the public school facility improvement grant program and asked about prioritizing funds between maintenance and major renovations. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of not neglecting school infrastructure and the need for comprehensive data on school needs. Rep. Malagari inquired about the department's readiness to administer PlanCon 2.0 and the state reimbursement for typical projects. Sec. Rowe confirmed preparation for discussions on PlanCon 2.0 with the correct personnel. Rep. Malagari asked about the impact of federal funding on schools, noting the percentages of school funding from federal sources in Pennsylvania such as North Penn and Souderton Area school districts. Sec. Rowe stressed that the removal of federal funding would be "catastrophic" and highlighted the importance of Title and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds. Rep. Malagari questioned if the discussed changes would lead to a tax increase. Sec. Rowe stated she thought it would, but did not "deal in hypotheticals."

Rep. Joshua Kail (R-Beaver) addressed the importance of effective use of education funding and asked about the department's measures to ensure quality education across all school districts. Sec. Rowe detailed the accountability process for the Ready to Learn block grant, including approval of planned fund use and monitoring of actual spending. Rep. Kail inquired about the consequences for school districts that misuse funds or underperform. Sec. Rowe explained the approach of identifying root causes and implementing action plans for improvement. Rep. Kail emphasized the need for consequences for continuously underperforming school districts to ensure quality education for children. He questioned the effectiveness of removing funding from underperforming schools and sought alternative methods to ensure quality education. Sec. Rowe responded that schools in the lowest 5% receive a comprehensive school improvement designation to address the root causes of underperformance.

Rep. Kyle Mullins (D-Lackawanna) highlighted the importance of executive functioning skills for academic and professional success and asked if these skills are consistently taught in schools. Sec. Rowe emphasized the significance of skills like planning and note-taking, noting typing as an underappreciated skill and expressing appreciation for her high school typing teacher. Rep. Mullins acknowledged his own typing teacher. Sec. Rowe spoke about the need to have students engage with these skills to make them more successful.

Rep. Jeff Olsommer (R-Wayne) discussed the lack of comprehensive CTE centers in Wayne and Pike counties and how it limits economic opportunities for students. He highlighted the state's budget proposal, which includes a \$149.6 million appropriation for CTE, an increase of \$5.5 million or 3.8% from the previous year. He asked how the increase would be allocated. Sec. Rowe explained that the budget increase supports both subsidies and equipment grants for CTE. Rep. Olsommer asked about specific examples to expand career pathways for students. She highlighted a new program that enables high school students to gain skills toward becoming teachers through dual enrollment credits which makes college more affordable.

Rep. Anthony Bellmon (D-Philadelphia) inquired about the "Safe Driving Course" appropriation in the PDE budget and how its funds will be utilized. Sec. Rowe stated that the department provides a subsidy to school districts for safe driving programs to help offset costs for instructors. Rep. Bellmon asked if there were statistics present on how many schools provide driver education programs. Sec. Rowe promised to follow up later with details, as she did not have statistics with her. Rep. Bellmon raised concerns about the state funding for libraries not keeping pace with inflation and asked about the challenges libraries face. Sec. Rowe highlighted the governor's budget proposal of \$70 million to support libraries. She emphasized their importance in communities with workforce development, technology, and as an information hub. Rep. Bellmon inquired about the impact of contracting requirements on school

renovations. Sites explained the financial process and detailed the need for follow-up on funds managed by DCED. Rep. Bellmon also asked whether charter schools could access funding for renovations. Sec. Rowe confirmed they could.

Rep. Kristin Marcell (R-Bucks) expressed concern over the modest funding increase for CTE programs along with the growing waitlists. She asked if the department collects data on these waitlists. Sec. Rowe was unsure about specific data collection but promised to look into it. Rep. Marcell thanked Sec. Rowe for her response, noting the difficulties of children missing out on CTE opportunities due to low funding. She inquired about the demand for competitive equipment grants exceeding the supply and asked for metrics on these grants. Sec. Rowe confirmed the high demand and availability of metrics, promising to provide this information. Rep. Marcell hoped for proper funding for CTCs and stated her intention to discuss the certification process for CTCs in the afternoon session.

Rep. Justin Fleming (D-Dauphin) asked about the prevalence of structured literacy programs in school districts for grades K-3, following a bipartisan bill to promote literacy initiatives. Sec. Rowe expressed frustration with the varying rates of adoption of structured literacy across districts. She detailed the use of adequacy funding to indirectly measure its implementation. Rep. Fleming asked whether adequacy funding and the Ready to Learn Block Grant could be used for aspects related to structured literacy. Sec. Rowe highlighted the availability of a free structured literacy course on the Standards Aligned System (SAS) website and another course provided by TAN to support professional development in a budget-friendly manner.

Rep. Fleming expressed his intention to allocate more resources towards structured literacy and shifted focus to early intervention, asking about the process for determining funding increases for early intervention services. Sec. Rowe initially confused early intervention with Pre-K Counts but then explained the process involves meeting with practitioners and working with partners to decide on necessary funding increases. Rep. Fleming inquired about the projection used to determine the number of students served in early intervention. Brown responded that future budgets are based on proposed numbers developed with early intervention providers, reflecting significant growth and using data from the previous year for projections.

Rep. Jamie Barton (R-Schuylkill) presented data showing the total savings of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts increased from \$3.3 billion in 2010-2011 to \$6.8 billion in 2022-2023 and asked what this indicates about the fiscal condition of the school districts. Sec. Rowe cautioned against drawing too many conclusions from the increase in fund balances, noting various factors, including the impact of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding on facilities, could explain the increases. Rep. Barton stated the public school system was failing children in the commonwealth but noted concerns about changes in family dynamics and education at home. He asked if PDE needs more money or needs to change the allocation of money to teach children more basic livable skills like personal finance instead of providing free lunches. Sec. Rowe highlighted the upcoming mandate for personal finance in high schools by the 2026-27 school year, aiming to prepare students for life with essential skills.

Rep. Joshua Siegel (D-Lehigh) discussed the negative impacts of not investing in early childhood education in Pennsylvania. He lamented challenges for educators and the economy and asked for insights into addressing these issues. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the underpayment of early childhood educators and noted Governor Shapiro's budget proposal which will increase funding for pre-K counts seats to raise educators' salaries and benefits for all. Rep. Siegel emphasized the need for salary parity between early childhood educators and K-12 teachers and the high cost of infant childcare in Pennsylvania. He advocated for universal childcare or capping costs at 7% of a family's income, which could save families an average of \$6,300 annually. He asked about the indirect costs to families from not adequately funding early childhood education. Sec. Rowe agreed with the importance of investing in early childhood education, highlighting the immediate payoffs and positive economic impacts that would save income for families to spend elsewhere. Rep. Siegel pointed out the \$6.6 billion annual cost due to inadequate early childhood education in Pennsylvania. He emphasized the economic and familial costs, urging for a discussion on properly funding the system. Sec. Rowe emphasized the critical need for investing in early childhood education to avoid leaving families and children behind for Pennsylvania's economic advancement.

Rep. Eric Davanzo (R-Westmoreland) inquired about the Public Schools Facilities Improvement line including a budget allocation of an additional \$25 million, totaling \$125 million, and asked whether PDE supports the Solar for Schools Program. Sec. Rowe stated that while PDE supports teaching about alternate energy sources and provides technical assistance, the specific Solar for Schools Program is not within their purview, indicating that responsibility falls under DCED or Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA). Rep. Davanzo asked if there is a study that shows putting solar panels on schools' roofs with increase educational success. Sec. Rowe acknowledged that there is no evidence showing that installing solar panels on school roofs directly improves student performance. Rep. Davanzo questioned the allocation of \$25 million for solar panels from a total of \$125 million, asking about the specific allocation for solar projects. He expressed concern over prioritizing solar panels over removing lead pipes from schools. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of both solar panels and removing hazardous materials like lead and asbestos from schools. She stated that the solar panel program aims to reduce energy costs and has a broader impact beyond education. Rep. Davanzo raised concerns about the financial and environmental implications of solar panels, including the cost of removal and nickel contamination. Sec. Rowe suggested that DCED could provide more detailed information on the program's guidelines and the cost-effectiveness of solar panels.

Rep. Joe Webster (D-Montgomery) discussed the importance of early intervention and structured literacy, noting a budget increase for hiring reading specialists in the Norristown school district. He asked about the necessity of an annual budget supplement for early intervention. Brown explained the process for projecting early intervention increases, which involves analyzing previous years' data and consulting with providers to estimate service needs. She encouraged providers experiencing increased demands to communicate with their early intervention specialists for better planning and resource allocation.

Rep. Webster asked about how to support public libraries which connect to people of all ages even before entering school. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of commonwealth public libraries in community development, advocating for funding that matches their value in workforce development, social services and technology education.

Rep. Eric Nelson (R-Westmoreland) expressed concern about the safety of students, particularly those attending charter schools, during their transportation. He highlighted disputes over equal transportation funding between public schools and charter schools, citing specific instances in Wilksburg and Penn Hills School Districts where charter school students received unequal treatment. He asked for thoughts on ensuring equal transportation for all students within a district. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the complexity of ensuring equal transportation for public and charter school students, attributing the difficulty to outdated charter school laws. Rep. Nelson discussed the safety concerns for charter school students using public buses and highlighted a recent incident where a high school student was shot near a bus depot. He pointed out that about 2,800 students, including 1,100 elementary school students, are affected by transportation disputes. He asked if Sec. Rowe would support legislative changes to ensure safer transportation options. Sec. Rowe explained that the current law specifies "transportation" without mandating a specific type, such as yellow buses, stating her agency would need a legislative change to mandate specific transportation types.

Rep. Nelson inquired about the allocation of funds for school district transportation, noting an increase in the last two years and asking specifically about specialized funding for special needs students. He suggested that the issue might be a lack of funds rather than a lack of willingness to transport students. Sec. Rowe stated she would welcome any conversation and changes that would enable a more responsive approach to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of students during transportation.

Rep. Gina Curry (D-Delaware) discussed the importance of fully funding the student stipend program. She inquired about the number of applications received, the impact of not fully funding the program, and the effect on schools and individual student teachers in terms of equitable opportunities. Sec. Rowe discussed the initial \$20 million funding for student-teacher stipends and the decision to double the funding to \$40 million. She highlighted the program's aim to support approximately 5,500 student teachers annually with a stipend of \$10,000 per student. She emphasized the goal of fully funding every student teacher, particularly in high-need areas. Rep. Curry thanked Sec. Rowe for her advocacy on the issue.

Rep. Ryan Warner (R-Fayette) followed up on earlier questions regarding the growth of district savings from \$3.3 billion in 2010-2011 to \$6.8 billion in 2023-2024, inquiring if there was any more recent data indicating whether that fund balance has increased further in 2023-2024. Sec. Rowe replied, "When school districts' AFRs (Annual Financial Reports) are completed and sent to the department, they're published on our website, and at that point, we would have access to the information for what the fund balances are in the current year."

Rep. Warner wondered about the dollar amount of funding that districts with a fund balance would receive under the governor's proposal and the additional funding expected for schools with a \$6.8 billion fund balance. Sec. Rowe stated she did not have the answers to these questions. Rep. Warner expressed concern about the disparity in school district funding. He explained that some districts in his county struggle to afford basic supplies due to a funding imbalance while the budget has grown from \$3.3 billion to \$6.8 billion. He asked for Sec. Rowe's thoughts on creating a more equitable funding process. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the concerns and specified that \$6.8 billion refers to the total fund balances across all school districts in the commonwealth, not the average amount held by each district. Rep. Warner highlighted the disparity in financial management among school districts and stressed the importance of understanding how much more funds well-off districts will receive. Sec. Rowe suggested that Rep. Warner might be mischaracterizing the situation, to which Warner disagreed. Sec. Rowe responded to Rep. Warner's concerns by stating that the AFRs are not currently available for review but assured they could be accessed once available. She detailed that school districts typically maintain no more than 8% of their expenditure in fund balances as per regulations.

Rep. Dave Madsen (D-Dauphin) asked when the results of the library regulations review would be available. Sec. Rowe stated the review would be available soon. She highlighted many of the regulations may be more relaxed due to their old nature to allow for more freedom and access to additional funds.



## House Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with PDE

02/24/25, 1:15 p.m., House Floor, Main Capitol

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a continuation of its budget hearing with the Department of Education.

The Department of Education (PDE) was represented by:

- Dr. Carrie Rowe, Acting Secretary of Education, PDE,
- Lynette Kuhn, Deputy Secretary for Postsecondary and Higher Education, PDE,
- Shante' Brown, Deputy Secretary for Child Development and Early Learning, PDE, and
- Jessica Sites, Director, Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management, PDE.

Chairman Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia) welcomed attendees back from lunch and reopened the next round of questions from members. He also wished a "Happy Birthday" to both Sec. Rowe and House Appropriations Committee Republican Executive Director Ritchie LaFaver.

Rep. Abigail Salisbury (D-Allegheny) expressed concerns from parents in her district about the enforcement of individualized education programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans for children with special needs, asking about the distinction between federal and state levels of PDE's involvement. Sec. Rowe reassured that the Shapiro administration is committed to enforcing laws for students with disabilities and is seeking clarification from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) on important matters.

Rep. Salisbury inquired about potential changes in the enforcement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the ability to appeal determinations regarding accommodations if there is a reduction in funding. Sec. Rowe highlighted concerns over the potential loss of \$600 million in IDEA funds and its impact on supporting students with disabilities, stating the department is monitoring for further guidance.

Rep. Salisbury asked if the state can assist parents with issues related to Section 504, IEPs, or other special needs accommodations typically appealed to a federal authority. Sec. Rowe confirmed that parents have state-level options to seek redress for issues related to special needs accommodations.

Rep. Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster), minority chairman, House Education Committee, asked about safeguards against schools potentially raising tuition in response to a proposal capping cyber reimbursements at \$8,000. Sec. Rowe said the \$8,000 rate is specific to cyber schools, which do not set their charges arbitrarily but through a process using the PDE 363 form.

Rep. Cutler inquired about the possibility of schools offering additional programs to achieve a higher rate. He questioned why traditional schools have not been offered a similar cap to cyber schools and about the impact of the proposal on cyber schools, particularly those without fund balances or at risk of depleting their funds. Sec. Rowe responded that the current funding for cyber schools is considered excessive based on their fund balances, suggesting that the proposed \$8,000 funding level could be revisited if found to be too low. Rep. Cutler also inquired about a bill that would cap cyber school reimbursement rates, to which Sec. Rowe expressed openness to discussions and offered technical assistance.

Rep. Peter Schweyer (D-Lehigh), chairman, House Education Committee, discussed findings from an Auditor General's audit of five cyber charter schools, highlighting discrepancies in funding and expenditures, including significant increases in revenue and fund balances, and questionable spending on items like staff bonuses and vehicle payments. He raised concerns about the lack of public accountability and oversight mechanisms for such expenditures. Sec. Rowe mentioned that the oversight tools for monitoring cyber charter schools are limited and retrospective, primarily used during the renewal period to review financials and data.

Rep. Charity Grimm Krupa (R-Fayette) discussed the issue of school choice and the lack of new programs in the budget to support it. Sec. Rowe explained that the budget focuses on directing funds to schools most in need to address the root causes of issues rather than removing students from underperforming schools. She defined failing schools according to federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) guidelines and the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) definition, identifying the lowest performing schools as those needing comprehensive improvement or additional support. Sec. Rowe also mentioned that there are 163 schools classified as low performing across the commonwealth, including 134 schools from school districts and 29 charter schools.

Rep. Krupa asked about the options for parents with children in failing schools, especially in areas like Southern Fayette County without brick-and-mortar charter schools. She shared her personal experience with cyber schools during COVID-19 and highlighted the challenge of affording private education in her poor, rural area. Sec. Rowe mentioned allocating resources to schools to identify and address their issues as an initial step.

Rep. Krupa asked about immediate options for parents with children in failing schools, emphasizing the urgency of the situation. Sec. Rowe mentioned the OSTC scholarship as a potential option for parents, inquiring if this was what Rep. Krupa was referring to, and highlighted the existence of Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) scholarships to help parents afford private school tuition.

Rep. Krupa inquired about where a student from Fayette County would utilize a scholarship. Sec. Rowe explained that any school district not in the lowest performance bracket could choose to accept students from failing schools.

Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny) followed up on questions about school choice, mentioning a Commonwealth Court order that mandates funding. Sec. Rowe confirmed the court order mandates funding public schools. Rep. Kinkead asked if the legislature were to fund school vouchers and a student receives a school voucher, are private schools required to accept the student “merely because they have the voucher.” Sec. Rowe replied, “No.” Rep. Kinkead then shifted the discussion to Solar for Schools, inquiring about the benefits of having solar panels on schools. Sec. Rowe responded that installing solar panels on schools would lead to reduced energy costs. Rep. Kinkead asked if energy and utility costs were reduced where the secretary thinks money would be spent. Sec. Rowe said she hoped that reduced energy costs would be directly used to help students.

Rep. Kinkead discussed the benefits of establishing universal school meals. She asked if that would provide an ability to “create the lunch room as a classroom,” teaching students where food comes from and creating partnerships with local farms. Sec. Rowe replied, “Absolutely.”

Rep. Kinkead discussed the “chaos at the federal level,” noting the significant funding PDE receives from the federal level to support various students. She asked, “Are you guys preparing a plan to shore up against the potential catastrophic collapse if the federal Department of Education is eliminated?” Sec. Rowe explained PDE’s approach to potential federal funding cuts, emphasizing the importance of understanding the full impact and acknowledging the severity of potential outcomes. Rep. Kinkead asked about the initial steps to protect funding and students impacted by the elimination of certain programs. Sec. Rowe mentioned that the initial steps involve understanding the specifics of the situation to assess the impacts accurately.

Rep. Kinkead asked if Pennsylvania could compensate for the lost revenue towards education if ED were eliminated and reimbursements for school meals were lost. Sec. Rowe mentioned that it would be challenging for the commonwealth to absorb a loss of \$1.6 billion in revenue.

Rep. Thomas Kutz (R-Cumberland) focused on the elimination of funding for mobile science and math education programs from the governor's budget proposal, inquiring about the reasoning behind this decision and the possibility of reconsidering funding for these programs to align with the governor's vision for enhancing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. Sec. Rowe said she was “pleased” to hear Rep. Kutz likes the STEM education programs. She explained, “These are legislative-led initiatives, and it is customary for them to be at the zero level, and then to consider whether or not they're going to be placed back in based on legislative support.” Rep. Kutz said he understood the governor’s position as “the legislature can advocate for that.”

Rep. Kutz discussed the importance of libraries and asked about restoring funding for them, emphasizing their role in providing equal access to resources, especially in rural areas. Sec. Rowe replied, “You will get no arguments from me if you want to engage in conversations about increasing the line item related to public libraries.” She acknowledged public libraries' significance in communities. Rep. Kutz then inquired about the governor's comfort level with funding for the EITC program, highlighting its role in offering school choice. Sec. Rowe responded that the governor's focus is on directing funds toward historically underfunded schools. Rep. Kutz further asked about ensuring scholarships for non-traditional education options for students with special needs or learning disabilities. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of providing various educational options and advised consulting with school officials for available alternatives.

Rep. Aerion Abney (D-Allegheny) expanded on the topic of IEPs and special education, noting a 10% increase in special education students over four years. He asked whether an IEP enrollment automatically classifies a student as part of the special education system, to which Sec. Rowe confirmed it does. Rep. Abney sought clarification on the IEP evaluation process. Sec. Rowe explained it involves identifying a student's needs through evaluation and tailoring the IEP accordingly. Rep. Abney inquired whether students often exit special education before graduation. Sec. Rowe stated that students can exit if they no longer need the support.

Rep. Abney then discussed the potential misclassification of students in special education and transitioned to higher education funding, asking about the proposed \$60 million for performance-based funding. Sec. Rowe mentioned the initiative is in its early stages and deferred to Kuhn for details. Kuhn explained that the council conducted public hearings to discuss the structure and criteria for performance-based funding, planning to use feedback for legislative recommendations on fund allocation.

Rep. Kristin Marcell (R-Bucks) mentioned a December 2024 WHYY article about a federal civil rights investigation into the Philadelphia School District's failure to protect Jewish students from harassment and asked for updates on the issue. Sec. Rowe responded that PDE could provide technical assistance to the district but does not receive regular updates on the situation. Rep. Marcell then inquired if the district's failure to protect Jewish students could jeopardize their funding, to which Sec. Rowe replied that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) prefers resolving issues rather than penalizing non-compliance. Rep. Marcell also brought up concerns about unaddressed allegations of harassment against Jewish students and asked if Sec. Rowe would support a study on Holocaust and genocide curriculum. Sec. Rowe expressed openness to considering such a study and mentioned existing efforts to provide resources and professional development on the topic.

Rep. Justin Fleming (D-Dauphin) discussed the importance of a safe learning environment and questioned whether the \$75 million funding for physical plant improvements was sufficient for the needs of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts. He asked for an accounting of past funding allocations and how they were used. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the data on recent funding rounds and the unmet needs of schools, stating that previous funding only addressed a small portion of the issues. Rep. Fleming shared a personal anecdote to emphasize the need for significant funding for public school infrastructure and proposed developing a specific program for school redevelopment and capital assistance.

Rep. Eric Nelson (R-Westmoreland) expressed support for heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) grants and highlighted the secretary's quote on the importance of health, safety and welfare in schools. He referenced a 2019 lawsuit against Philadelphia District schools and a study showing a high percentage of teachers experiencing violence, asking if Sec. Rowe was aware of this study. Sec. Rowe said, "I'm not aware of the statistics that you're suggesting, but I would say that even one incident of violence is too much in our schools."

Rep. Nelson highlighted the issue of violence against teachers in Pennsylvania schools, attributing it to restrictive policies post-lawsuit and asking for thoughts on making policies less restrictive. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the violence against teachers as unacceptable and expressed willingness to work on changing legislation for more flexibility. Rep. Nelson also discussed the financial burden on superintendents due to outsourcing students to private schools, costing between \$50,000 to \$75,000 per student, and mentioned the success of diploma retrieval programs.

Rep. Gina Curry (D-Delaware) discussed the impact of COVID-19 on students, particularly those in third and fourth grade during the pandemic, and the challenges they face with reading and math skills due to inequitable funding. She expressed concern over potential cuts to programs supporting these students and asked for Sec. Rowe's thoughts on maintaining funding. Sec. Rowe highlighted the Shapiro administration's budget increases and proposed ongoing funding as key to addressing educational losses, emphasizing the need for flexibility in funding to support affected students. Rep. Curry expressed concern about the sustainability of positive programs without adequate funds and the potential impact of a future pandemic on existing inequities.

Rep. Josh Kail (R-Beaver) expressed surprise at the discussion of federal issues and asked Sec. Rowe if she agreed that states are better positioned to manage federal dollars for education. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the significant role of ED in offering guidance and oversight. She added, "Removing them altogether from the equation would certainly be a major change." Rep. Kail asserted that the federal secretary of education "never comes here to answer questions from us about Pennsylvania families and having the opportunity to have more influence on federal money." He continued, "I don't see how that's not a win for the Pennsylvania Department of Education." Sec. Rowe replied, "They might not answer questions to this body in particular, but certainly the Department of Education at the federal level does answer questions that we pose to them and that guidance has been invaluable over the years." Rep. Kail discussed the increase in funding for ready-to-learn block grants from \$800 million to \$1.3 billion in the last budget and questioned whether this funding level would be adequate to meet the adequacy gap. Sec. Rowe responded, "I don't think it's being suggested in this budget that it be flat-lined, rather that it is this legislative body's decision on how much that is put into the adequacy fund."

Rep. Kail criticized the current budget forecasts for being unrealistic and inadequate, particularly highlighting the reliance on temporary funds to cover structural deficits and the challenges of planning without accurate forecasts. He questioned the administration's rationale behind setting a flat \$8,000 funding rate for cyber schools, asking for an explanation of how this figure was determined. Sec. Rowe explained that the \$8,000 figure for cyber school funding likely reflects the actual cost of educating a student in a cyber setting, considering the reduced overhead costs compared to physical schools. Rep. Kail sought clarification on the actual cost of educating a student in a cyber location. Sec. Rowe replied, "I think that's what we're attempting to get at here with the \$8,000." Rep. Kail questioned if that was the actual cost per student or the lowest amount. Sec. Rowe explained that the current

payment a school district makes for a cyber school student is \$7,700, suggesting that \$8,000 should adequately cover the costs of educating a regular education student in a cyber setting.

Rep. Manuel Guzman (D-Berks) asked if the Pennsylvania Constitution mandates the General Assembly to ensure the maintenance and support of a comprehensive and efficient public education system, to which Sec. Rowe responded affirmatively. Rep. Guzman suggested that the real issue with failing schools is consistent underfunding by the legislative body, particularly affecting districts like Reading, and Sec. Rowe agreed. Rep. Guzman emphasized the importance of fulfilling the constitutional obligation to provide a thorough and efficient public education system for all children in the commonwealth, regardless of their immigrant status, and inquired about the inclusivity of public education rights under the Pennsylvania Constitution. Sec. Rowe stated that the Shapiro administration's values regarding who should receive education in Pennsylvania have remained unchanged, confirming that migrant and undocumented students are entitled to the same educational benefits as U.S. citizens.

Rep. Guzman inquired about Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement actions within Pennsylvania schools and the guidance provided to school districts regarding interactions with ICE. Sec. Rowe mentioned that ICE enforcement activities have not occurred within schools, but in their vicinity, and advised schools to consult with their solicitors on handling ICE or police involvement on campus. Rep. Guzman asked if documentation proving citizenship status is required to enroll children in schools within the commonwealth and about the administration's stance towards undocumented students fearing ICE agents might enter their schools. Sec. Rowe stated that the administration's values regarding students' entitlement to free and appropriate education in Pennsylvania have not changed, expressing regret for the fear and uncertainty students may feel about ICE agents potentially removing them from schools.

Rep. Guzman asked what PDE has done regarding legal guidance. Sec. Rowe mentioned that the department provides legal guidance for schools on issues related to migrant or refugee students through their basic education circulars. Rep. Guzman emphasized the Pennsylvania Constitution's mandate for providing education to all students, including undocumented or migrant students.

Rep. Eric Davanzo (R-Westmoreland) asked about the annual cost to the commonwealth for educating the children of illegal immigrants, to which Sec. Rowe responded that the department does not collect information on immigration status. Rep. Davanzo expressed concern over the financial implications of the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) program at local Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers and asked if there were remedies for the cost increases. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the value of the NOCTI and expressed openness to working on potential changes. Rep. Davanzo discussed challenges related to bringing in private business owners to grade student projects in the NOCTI program, and Sec. Rowe mentioned they are open to discussions on alleviating these concerns.

Rep. Steve Malagari (D-Montgomery) raised concerns about how school districts should navigate executive orders from Washington D.C., addressing COVID-19 vaccine mandates and gender ideology, and asked for guidance from PDE. Sec. Rowe explained PDE is seeking clarity on the executive orders and advised school districts to work with their legal counsel. Rep. Malagari then shifted the discussion to charter school funding, presenting data on the financial support allocated for non-special education and special education students in both brick-and-mortar and cyber charter schools. Sec. Rowe explained that the discrepancy in funding between brick-and-mortar and cyber charter school students for special education is due to a legislative change involving the assumption of the percentage of students requiring special education, capped at the actual percentage or 16%, a rule that applies only to cyber schools.

Rep. Tim Brennan (D-Bucks) highlighted the decline in civic engagement among young Americans and criticized Act 35 for not adequately assessing civic education in schools. He referenced a report grading Pennsylvania's civic and U.S. History education standards as F and suggested the state could enhance civic education through incentives or direction. Sec. Rowe expressed interest in the incentives Rep. Brennan might have in mind. Rep. Brennan noted a bill that tried to encourage voting and pre-registering students. He asked if school districts are prioritizing civic education. Sec. Rowe said, "I think civic education is an integral part of what we do in the K-12 system and I think it is not just a high school thing or just a middle school thing, but it has to be something that's incorporated throughout the schooling." She voiced openness to ideas from Rep. Brennan. Rep. Brennan discussed the effectiveness of current programs aimed at enhancing civic education and questioned whether they are achieving their goals. He emphasized the importance of preparing students to be functioning citizens, especially as the 250th anniversary of the country approaches, and suggested looking into how other states are successfully educating their students. Sec. Rowe agreed.

Rep. Josh Siegel (D-Lehigh) criticized the phrase "failing public schools" and argued that inadequate funding is the reason for poor performance in Pennsylvania's schools. He referenced the Commonwealth Court ruling to support his point that public education can succeed when adequately funded. Rep. Siegel discussed the proficiency standards of Commonwealth Charter Academy (CCA), highlighting that only a small percentage of its students met proficiency in English, math and science. He questioned the accountability of cyber charter schools compared to public schools, emphasizing the disparity in educational outcomes between traditional public schools and cyber charters. Rep. Siegel also discussed legislation proposing to cap the reimbursement rate for

cyber charters at \$8,000 and questioned the true freedom of school choice under voucher systems, highlighting discriminatory language in some schools' policies. Sec. Rowe agreed that being well-funded and well-resourced is a significant reason why some educational systems perform better than others and that the statistics cited by Rep. Siegel support the assertion that well-resourced and well-funded suburban districts achieve good educational outcomes. She agreed that the statistics seemed reasonable and stated that there is no constitutional obligation to keep cyber charter schools open.

Rep. Siegel shared his experiences as a speech and debate student and highlighted the importance of extracurricular activities like speech and debate in preparing students for societal engagement. He asked about the value of programs like the Allentown School District's summer youth internship program. Sec. Rowe emphasized the benefits of extracurricular activities, particularly academic games like speech and debate, in supporting students' education and reinforcing educational standards. Rep. Siegel described a memorable debate experience and stressed the importance of learning to argue both sides of an argument to challenge preconceived notions and lamented the loss of productive discussion in society.

Rep. La'Tasha Mayes (D-Allegheny) highlighted efforts in advancing menstrual equity and addressing period poverty, inquiring about the outcomes of the \$3 million allocation for free menstrual products in 500 school districts, including the program's successes, challenges and areas needing further investment. Sec. Rowe thanked the legislature, governor and first lady for supporting the menstrual hygiene product grant, noting its role in ensuring equal educational access for females and mentioning that some schools declined the funding due to existing partnerships. Rep. Mayes inquired about the number of school districts participating and the number of students benefiting from the menstrual hygiene product program. Sec. Rowe mentioned that six schools declined the funding for menstrual hygiene products, and one school was looking to return it, indicating they didn't need it, without specifying the exact number of schools that utilized the funding. Sites mentioned the power of deduction was available to all, including school districts and charter schools. Sec. Rowe stated that out of over 747 school entities, six declined the funding and one was in the process of sending it back.

Rep. Mayes requested detailed numbers on school district participation and student utilization of the menstrual hygiene product program and inquired about PDE's guidance for school districts on addressing sexual violence, harassment and bullying, focusing on the protection of girls, young women and LGBTQ+ students. Sec. Rowe explained that the "It's On Us" movement addresses sexual assault among female students by raising awareness, implementing prevention tactics and improving reporting processes, supported by the It's On Us Grant.

Rep. Mayes asked about the measures being taken to vet adults, such as teachers and coaches, who have access to young people in school districts. Sec. Rowe described measures to protect students from sexual violence, emphasizing the importance of selecting individuals without past incidents for positions around students and the role of the It's On Us Grant in providing information to students for self-protection.

Rep. Paul Friel (D-Chester) revisited the topic of fund balances in the public school system, mentioning that discussions did not fully cover what fund balances are and their purpose. He highlighted recommendations from Gatsby suggesting a fund balance of about 16% and noted that from 2010 to 2022, fund balances in the public school system increased from 16% to about 17%, staying within the recommended range. Sec. Rowe commented on the necessity of funding for future needs, especially facilities, and observed that school districts are criticized for both insufficient funds and saving too much.

Rep. Friel explained that fund balances cover operating costs, including facilities, capital projects and maintenance, and highlighted the timing mismatch between tax collection and employee payments. He also pointed out that during the same period, charter schools' fund balances increased from just over 16% to over 40%, questioning if this rise was excessive. Sec. Rowe mentioned the lack of parity in fund balance increases between school districts and charter schools. Rep. Friel asked about oversight regarding the allocation of fund balances towards instructional programs at cyber or charter schools. Sec. Rowe mentioned that determinations can be made based on annual financial reports. Rep. Friel inquired about the legality of charter schools using their fund balance to purchase real estate. Sec. Rowe replied, "If it is an acceptable use of the funds, then they can proceed in that way." Rep. Friel asked if it would be fair to impose limitations on how tax dollars are spent. Sec. Rowe said, "I think anytime we can direct our funds to the specific needs that students have, we are better for doing so." Rep. Friel asked if there are any studies linking the amount of real estate owned to improvements in student performance. Sec. Rowe responded, "No."

Rep. Schweyer expressed appreciation for the professionals at PDE and highlighted the Future Ready PA Index. He mentioned the low proficiency rates in English, language arts and literature among students at commonwealth charter academies, noting a proficiency rate of 11%. Sec. Rowe acknowledged her awareness of the information presented. Rep. Schweyer highlighted the low proficiency rates in English, science and math among students at CCA, contrasting these with the better performance of students in the Allentown School District. He questioned Sec. Rowe about the percentage of students taking Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams. Sec. Rowe mentioned that the proficiency rate for commonwealth charter academies in English, language arts and literature for all students is "exceptionally low" at 24%. Rep. Schweyer highlighted the low proficiency rates in math and English Language Arts (ELA) among students in various cyber schools, questioning the effectiveness of these schools in

providing education. He asked about the proficiency standards set by the federal government for schools. Sec. Rowe said that related to taking the test, it is 95%. Rep. Schweyer asserted that Pennsylvania's proficiency is at 70% and that 95% of students are supposed to take standardized tests but in one cyber school 24 do. He continued that they are supposed to achieve a 70% proficiency rate in reading, math and science and they are at 4.7%. He asked if those scores are good enough to prepare children for STEM jobs, to which Sec. Rowe replied, "No." Rep. Schweyer emphasized the need for a deeper evaluation of cyber schools' value, pointing out their significant underperformance and low test participation rates.

Minority Chairman James Struzzi (R-Indiana) discussed the challenges in Pennsylvania's education system, including a \$3.5 billion funding gap and the need for a strategic approach to funding. He asked if it was true that Sec. Rowe said that "simply adding money will not solve these problems." Sec. Rowe replied, "I likely made that statement." Chairman Struzzi highlighted the significant increases in education funding over the past decade but noted that outcomes have not improved, suggesting inefficiencies in the system. He also stressed the importance of revising the funding formula and reevaluating standardized testing mechanisms to ensure they are effective and not overly burdensome. He asked, "It's not good to draw down your surplus or deplete your Rainy Day Fund, right?" Sec. Rowe said depleting the Rainy Day Fund "to zero would be irresponsible."

Chairman Struzzi emphasized, "You have an opportunity before you, I think, to do some good for educational systems in Pennsylvania, and we are here to help." He continued, "We all agree that we need to fund education, but we need to do it the right way. We need to do it effectively. We need to be responsible with taxpayer dollars. We need to look at outlying years, and we need to have some accountability."

Chairman Harris asked about measures to address the teacher certification process, highlighting the barriers for qualified individuals due to certification requirements. Sec. Rowe explained that the state offers internship certificates to allow individuals with significant expertise to teach while working towards certification, aiming to create more pathways into teaching and reduce barriers for potential educators. She also acknowledged the availability of information on their website's splash page but apologized for not having specific statistics on teacher certification processing times ready, promising to follow up.

Chairman Harris raised concerns about delays in teacher certification for individuals certified in other states like Georgia and New Jersey when they seek certification in Pennsylvania, asking for the typical duration of this process. Sec. Rowe noted significant decreases in the time required to process teacher certifications, as indicated by data on their website, but could not recall exact statistics, committing to providing this information later.

Chairman Harris inquired about contingency plans for the potential elimination of ED at the federal level, specifically regarding the anticipation and backup plans for federal funding. Sec. Rowe mentioned that President Donald Trump had suggested that if ED were closed, its funding would be redirected to another agency. She said, "On the one hand, the closing of the Department of Education would be exceptionally difficult, given all of the guidance that they provide to us, but the catastrophic piece would be if that funding were lost altogether. So, at least on the surface, having it moved to another agency wouldn't be a total loss."

Chairman Harris questioned the value of having an ED at the federal level. Sec. Rowe emphasized the critical role of ED in ensuring fair and equitable education for all students, especially those in special education, before its establishment. "I don't want to see anyone lose rights to a free and appropriate education," she said.

Chairman Harris expressed support for school choice, citing disparities in education quality based on race and economic status in Philadelphia County, and inquired about the current subscription status of tax credit programs like OSTC and EITC. Sec. Rowe admitted she did not have information on whether the tax credit programs are oversubscribed but was aware of the situation. Sites stated the need to follow up on specific numbers for the tax credit programs, as they are not managed by PDE, promising collaboration with counterparts for the necessary information. Chairman Harris noted that despite a \$50 million increase in EITC funding last year to a cap of \$375 million, \$74 million remains unused. Sec. Rowe mentioned not having given much thought to the issue of tax credit programs being oversubscribed, as it is outside their department's management. Chairman Harris pointed out that nearly 25% of funds in the OSTC program, aimed at students in failing schools, remain unused. Sec. Rowe was not surprised about the unused funds in the OSTC program, explaining PDE's limited role in providing a list of the lowest performing schools and noting that school districts often choose not to accept students from these schools, which could explain the unutilized funds.

Chairman Harris highlighted that over \$100 million allocated for educational programs remains unused as of February 24, emphasizing the availability of funds for enhancing educational choice and options. He also discussed a legal dispute between West Philadelphia Achievement Charter School and the School District of Philadelphia over a \$30 million payment related to over-enrollment issues, questioning the role of PDE in such situations and calling for changes to prevent similar disputes in the future. Sec. Rowe emphasized gathering data to determine the degree to which additional changes are needed. "I think that's something that's been missing from charter and cyber charter law over the years is we have an understanding that there need to be changes, we even have data in some situations, this situation notwithstanding," she said. "It would be time for us to step in and start to make changes that would positively affect everyone."

Chairman Harris asked about the issue of districts seeking resources for children they do not educate, highlighting concern over a decade-long problem. Sec. Rowe identified the core issue as existing legislation that causes disputes between charter schools and school districts, emphasizing the need for legislative attention to allow financial redirection back to districts.

Chairman Harris then shifted focus away from brick-and-mortar charter schools to address the problem of cyber charter schools in the commonwealth holding over \$600 million in reserves, questioning the adequacy of their use for education. Sec. Rowe stressed the importance of verifying charter school data and ensuring a level playing field for all types of charter schools.

Chairman Harris inquired Brown about changes related to switching providers, with Brown indicating she would discuss the matter further the following week with her work in the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Chairman Harris concluded by highlighting the economic contributions of undocumented workers and their children to the community, urging for respectful acknowledgment of their roles, and announced the continuation of budget hearings with the Department of State (DOS) tomorrow.



### **House Education Committee**

*02/25/25, 10:00 a.m., Room 515, Irvis Office Building*  
Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held an informational hearing on teacher certification.

Chairman Peter Schweyer (D-Lehigh) informed attendees that testimony materials and the livestream are available online.

Minority Chairman Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster) acknowledged the challenges in teacher certification processes, emphasizing the need for solutions to make the process less lengthy and expensive and to address long-term retention issues.

Chairman Schweyer highlighted the teacher shortage in Pennsylvania and mentioned efforts such as incentivizing individuals to enter the teaching field and establishing student-teacher stipends and new scholarship programs.

Tiffany McDole, policy director, Education Commission of the States (ECS), discussed the complexity of teacher shortages. She praised Pennsylvania's efforts in reducing financial burdens on student teachers and suggested targeted policy solutions based on examples from Colorado, Maryland and Minnesota. She also discussed the scrutiny of licensure exams and the importance of targeted, evidence-based policy solutions.

Rep. Barb Gleim (R-Cumberland) asked about the impact of requiring only an associate's degree for teacher certification on student outcomes. McDole responded that there isn't specific research comparing the two directly but emphasized the quality of teacher preparation over the type of degree obtained.

Rep. Paul Takac (D-Centre) inquired about efforts to facilitate certification for individuals from the labor market to become teachers in underserved areas. McDole discussed strategies to address teacher shortages in career and technical education (CTE), including creating adjunct licenses and alternative certification pathways. She highlighted New Jersey's approach to licensure assessments for CTE teachers.

Rep. Marc Anderson (R-York) highlighted the teacher shortages in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and special education. He expressed concern over the difficulties out-of-state teachers face in obtaining certification in Pennsylvania. He suggested making the transition smoother for professionals from the STEM field into teaching. He further raised concerns about the testing requirements for teacher certification, proposing the use of portfolios for evaluating teacher candidates. McDole discussed the challenges of transferring teaching licenses between states and the potential of the teacher mobility compact. She highlighted the varied approaches states take towards reciprocity and the challenges of ensuring teacher quality, especially in STEM fields. She noted that the majority of states allow teachers from other states under a provisional license. McDole also mentioned the trend of moving away from standardized tests towards more modern assessments and the exploration of portfolio models. Rep. Anderson shared his personal experience as a Troops to Teachers teacher and suggested recruiting more individuals from the

military using the GI Bill to pursue education degrees.

Rep. Jennifer O'Mara (D-Delaware) shared her personal experience of being certified in social studies and questioned whether there should be a shift in university programs to focus more on education certification first, allowing students to add on subjects they are qualified to teach. McDole acknowledged the issue of education programs not aligning with state labor market needs and the lack of data on teacher demand. She discussed efforts by some states to improve data systems, connect education preparation programs with local districts and reduce barriers for licensure in high-demand subjects. McDole also discussed the potential impact of dual certification on teacher placement.

Monika Williams Shealey, dean and professor, College of Education and Human Development, Temple University, discussed the challenges and strategies related to teacher certification, retention and recruitment. She highlighted that there was a 7.7% attrition rate, or 9,500 teachers, in the 2022–2023 academic year. Shealey spoke on the need for financial support for students entering the teaching profession, the expansion of dual credit and innovation grants and the adjustments in certification options to accommodate working professionals. She also addressed the issue of teacher mobility and advocated for regional partnerships and collective efforts among universities to address teacher shortages, citing the Temple Teacher Residency Program as an example of innovation in teacher preparation.

Rep. Mary Isaacson (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the importance of addressing the diverse educational needs across Pennsylvania's 500 school districts, mentioning the teacher shortage and suggesting adjustments in certifications to attract more educators, especially for vocational-technical education and for teaching students from immigrant populations. Rep. Isaacson proposed exploring ways to attract teachers from non-traditional backgrounds to bridge language barriers. "How can we attract for the different things that are going on in the different schools," she asked. Shealey emphasized the need for alignment between local school district needs and teacher preparation efforts. She discussed the potential for higher education to offer more inclusive certification programs. She pointed out that expediting certification processes can be difficult and there have not been many institutions that have been able to do it well.

Rep. Gleim discussed the crisis in affording college education and the need for reform in the certification process to make it more affordable. She suggested a more accessible pathway for students to enter teaching professions, possibly through a two-year program. Shealey highlighted the dual enrollment program as a key initiative for preparing future teachers, detailing pathways through community college or direct entry to Temple University and calling for continued support and the removal of barriers for participants in these pathways.

Rep. Takac inquired about the research behind the 7.7% attrition rate in the teaching profession and the challenges faced by "Grow Your Own" programs, especially in rural areas. He highlighted barriers such as financial issues and credentialing. Shealey emphasized the importance of working conditions and leadership in addressing attrition rates in the teaching profession and stressed the need for flexibility and responsiveness to the changing needs of the education landscape.

Chairman Cutler asked about the changes in four-year education programs at colleges and universities since 2000, focusing on the impact of COVID-19 and desired changes. Shealey discussed the changes at Temple University's College of Education and Human Development, including a focus on mental health support for students, curriculum overhaul with expedited certification options and a professional development schools' model to support Tanner Duckrey School starting in the fall.

Rep. Anderson highlighted the challenges faced by special education teachers, especially in managing disruptive behavior, and asked for solutions to help retain these teachers. Shealey emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes of disruptive behavior through positive behavior support, involving families and addressing trauma. She advocated for a systemic approach to developing knowledge and skills among educators and leaders.

Aaron Chapin, president, PA State Education Association (PSEA), discussed the importance of high-quality certification for educators, urging for policy changes that respect educators and maintain high standards. He outlined recommendations including updating the definition of a professional employee, establishing a transparent process for evaluating certifications, reducing financial burdens for certification and improving pathways for certificated individuals to return to teaching. He further addressed the shortage of certified teachers by reintroducing the K-6 certificates.

Emily Sager, PA policy manager, PA Teach Plus, emphasized the importance of eliminating unnecessary barriers to teacher certification while maintaining high standards. She urged for full funding between \$50 and \$55 million for student-teacher stipends and highlighted a \$4.2 million Teacher Apprenticeship Grant. Sager suggested the legislators consider teacher residency models to improve educator preparation.

Guy Ferguson, policy fellow, PA Teach Plus, noted that he is a bilingual fourth-grade teacher at Pan American Academy Charter. He highlighted his work to reimagine how Pennsylvania prepares educators. He explained that he struggled with the cost and tests to become a teacher when he transitioned to the career later in life. He explained that studies have shown that many individuals do not retake the Praxis test if they fail it the first time. Ferguson explained the best indicator of success for a new teacher is how well they manage classroom behavior. He said his cohort recommends waiving fees for Praxis exams, allowing for more flexible field-specific GPA requirements and an extension of the student-teaching experience to a full year.

John Pulver, executive director, Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA), discussed the challenges and outdated regulations in CTE certification in Pennsylvania. He highlighted the growth in CTE participation, capacity issues and the “cumbersome” process for industry professionals to become fully certified educators, advocating for a review of regulations to facilitate easier pathways for these individuals.

Chairman Schweyer reminded colleagues that the General Assembly passed a resolution for a study on barriers to CTE and suggested that any questions for Pulver be on the topic of teacher shortages.

Rep. John Schlegel (D-Lehigh) commented on the certification process and teacher shortage, emphasizing the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, content knowledge and effective instruction. He advocated for a K-to-6 and 6-to-12 content area certification and called for the elimination of the Praxis test. He suggested that qualifications and training should be left to higher education institutions. Chapin criticized the Praxis tests for teacher certification as expensive and not reflective of an educator's true abilities. He stated that he knew a young woman in Stroudsburg who failed the Praxis test many times but still became a great educator.

Rep. Takac discussed the idea of diversifying teacher certification, suggesting a model similar to the medical field with various levels of certification. He expressed hope that this approach would respect the professionalism of certification while addressing the need for more teachers in CTE. Chapin acknowledged efforts to explore different pathways to becoming an educator over the past five to ten years, emphasizing the importance of not undermining the value of education and knowledge required for the profession.

Rep. Takac explained his perspective on diversifying teacher certification, comparing it to medical practice and suggesting that reimagining credentialing could enhance the value of a teaching credential by potentially introducing supervisory roles for credentialed teachers. Chapin emphasized the importance of discussions about innovative approaches to education, highlighting current efforts to consider individuals with degrees and experience in other professions for roles in education.

Chairman Cutler acknowledged the importance of discussing solutions to increase access and practical exposure for students in certain fields, emphasizing the need to be cost-conscious and the value of including individuals with real-life experience in education. He highlighted the role of policymakers in finding effective solutions amidst competing requests for the benefit of students.

Chairman Schweyer highlighted the committee's focus on teacher certification bills and the need for a multifaceted approach to educational challenges that involves collaboration across chambers and parties. He expressed commitment to continuing discussions on improving teacher certification and education.



### **House Democratic Policy Committee**

*02/25/2025, 12:00 p.m., Room G-50, Irvis Office Building*  
Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a public hearing on wage theft.

Rep. Mary Isaacson (D-Philadelphia) welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated the Subcommittee on Labor, Energy and Development session would be chaired by Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny).

Rep. Kinkead highlighted the issue of wage theft, describing it as a \$50 billion annual problem. She noted a [package of bills](#) that was introduced, aimed at addressing it.

Robert Daley, principal attorney, Robert Peirce and Associates, P.C., testified about the significant problem of minimum wage and overtime violations in Pennsylvania. He explained that the problem is costing workers nearly a billion dollars annually and resulting in lost tax revenues for the commonwealth. He detailed the issue of overtime violations as almost 90% of employees are entitled to them under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). He highlighted the large amount of wage theft due to improper or misclassification of jobs for overtime eligibility. He suggested Pennsylvania could adopt higher salary thresholds for overtime eligibility and improve enforcement mechanisms against wage theft. He noted that Pennsylvania's laws do not currently provide adequate enforcement, proposing victims should be able to recover double or triple their lost wages. He appreciated the opportunity to speak in front of the committee today.

Michael Ford, secretary and treasurer, Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council, discussed wage theft in the construction industry, including practices of misclassifying hours and manipulating benefits costs. He shared his experience with Local 19 Sheet Metal Workers and the challenges of working with the Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) due to its limited budget. Ford highlighted the issue of worker exploitation and the lack of enforcement, suggesting the need for better outreach and funding for enforcement. He expressed a willingness to collaborate on solutions to address the widespread problem across Pennsylvania.

Daley highlighted the issues of the 1099 where someone may work two jobs for 30 hours each but are still not available for overtime. He spoke about employees getting 1099s or W-2s from different companies so they cannot be paid for overtime work. He lamented that some employers do not communicate that full-time workers are eligible and have a right to overtime pay.

Ford discussed the need to extend the look-back period for wage theft cases from 10 years to 20 years in central Pennsylvania, advocating for harsher penalties, including jail time, for those who steal workers' money. He criticized the current system's inadequacy in addressing the full extent of the harm caused.

Daley highlighted the limitations of the FLSA, which only allows for addressing violations within a two to three-year period. He suggested that criminal sanctions could enhance employer compliance in Pennsylvania.

Rep. Isaacson inquired about the enforcement responsibilities for wage and hour regulations. Ford stated that it primarily falls under L&I, though the Attorney General's Office handled a specific case in Centre County. Rep. Isaacson emphasized the need for an education campaign to inform workers of their rights and the correct entity to contact regarding wage theft, pointing out the issue of misclassifying workers as 1099 employees. Ford detailed his work towards L&I and discussed the liability and protections for 1099 employees, particularly concerning injuries sustained while using their employer's equipment.

Rep. Isaacson asked about protections and liability for work if an employee is injured, specifically if there was coverage under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Daley explained that independent contractors are covered by OSHA but often encounter difficulties with workers' compensation. He stated this often leads to legal challenges over employment status and potential civil action against employers. Rep. Isaacson said, "Okay, looks like we have some work to do."

Rep. Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz (D-Berks) shared personal observations about the employment conditions of relatives and her husband. She emphasized the challenges faced due to non-monetary compensations and the expectation to work beyond regular hours. She wondered about the testifiers' perspective on attacking this issue. Ford stressed the importance of documentation for managing work outside regular hours and recommended seeking legal advice if necessary.

Rep. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired about the legal classification of employees, specifically regarding their exemption status and eligibility for overtime pay. Daley specified the criteria for the administrative exemption under the FLSA, explaining that it depends on the independence of the employee's operations. He noted that some compensation for overtime must be in cash at one and a half times the rate of pay, not compensatory time. Rep. Cepeda-Freytiz asked if that meant compensatory time was illegal. Daley stated that compensatory time does not equate to overtime for those eligible, as it does not involve pay or time-and-half calculation.

Rep. Paul Takac (D-Centre) expressed concern about Pennsylvania's reliance on federal standards for administrative exceptions and questioned what state-level actions could be taken to strengthen protections. Daley discussed the Department of Labor under the Biden administration's active role in enforcing the FLSA, including a \$35 million judgment against a nursing home chain for overtime violations. He suggested that states could create their own exemptions for overtime and raise the minimum salary for overtime eligibility. He emphasized the need for criminal enforcement against intentional labor and wage law violations. He expressed concerns about the challenges workers will face at the federal level over the next four years. Rep. Takac expressed interest in proactive measures for labor and wage law enforcement. Daley agreed to compile and forward proposals for action. Rep. Takac remarked, "We need to protect the people who are actually doing the work."

Rep. Kinkead discussed her proposed bills that would equate tribal damage and wage theft with retail theft in terms of criminal penalties. She noted the importance of allowing the recovery of attorney's fees and asked for a discussion on the benefit of having attorney's fees as well as being able to recover attorney's fees. Daley highlighted the challenges of recovering wages without the availability of attorney's fees and the effectiveness of the threat of attorney's fees in resolving cases.

Rep. Kinkead asked how companies can go about addressing splitting for the 1099 issues and can acknowledge that somebody is working on one job for one employer. Ford discussed the challenges faced by workers classified as 1099 employees in the construction industry. He emphasized the importance of knowledge and awareness for workers to protect themselves. "Knowledge, I believe, would be the power that we need," he remarked. Daley stated the problems do not exist much in union jobs because of collective bargaining agreements. He noted the difficulties with other occupations such as subcontractors.

Rep. Takac raised concerns about the lack of whistleblower protection for individuals reporting violations or questioning their employment status. He emphasized the risks of retaliation and the need for existing protection. Daley acknowledged the challenges faced by whistleblowers, especially in smaller job sites, and proposed a "safe harbor" provision to protect whistleblowers during the complaint process, provided the complaint is not made in bad faith. He emphasized the difficulty of enforcing such protections but highlighted the necessity of giving employees a sense of security.

Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the seriousness of wage theft and detailed a specific instance of a restaurant stealing tips. He asked for advice on educating constituents about recognizing and addressing wage theft and misclassification. Ford suggested that having clear examples of individuals penalized for wage theft, such as going to jail, could serve as a deterrent. He highlighted the need for stronger laws to address the issue. Daley discussed the pervasive issue of wage theft, emphasizing the need for Pennsylvania to raise its minimum wage and ensure tipped and seasonal employees receive at least the federal minimum wage. He recommended a comprehensive study from Temple University's School of Law as a valuable resource for understanding wage theft and improving laws to combat the issue.

Rep. Andre Carroll (D-Philadelphia) inquired if gig economy workers have been considered in the wage theft conversation and how they can report such activities. Daley discussed the challenges faced by gig economy workers. He emphasized the need for unionization to address issues such as wage theft and ensuring workers receive at least the minimum wage. He expressed skepticism about the political will to make necessary changes. Ford agreed on the need for a comprehensive approach to address issues in the gig economy. He detailed the importance of multi-pronged efforts, including responsible legislation to eliminate bad actors in the industry.

Rep. Isaacson asked about the legality of tip pooling in restaurants and whether owners have the deciding factor in who takes tips. Daley stated that employers cannot take tips from employees and that tip pooling is allowed only among tipped employees, not including managers or non-tipped staff. He highlighted illegal wage theft practices in high-end restaurants where managers take a portion of tips. Rep. Isaacson referenced her experience in the hospitality industry and asked if sharing tips with hostesses through pooling is considered acceptable and if management uses that as an excuse to pool tips. Daley explained that participation in tip pools depends on the employee's role and wage, with certain low-wage employees like hostesses being eligible, but not higher-paid employees like managers. He noted that in the casino industry, dealers can pool tips, but pit bosses cannot. Rep. Isaacson inquired if distributing pooled tips to staff like hostesses is acceptable barring misconduct. Daley confirmed that the casino industry strictly adheres to tip-pooling regulations to avoid legal issues.

Rep. Kinkead highlighted the importance of legal compliance in the casino industry and asked about the implications for workers injured during unpaid time. Ford noted that injuries during unpaid time can hinder a worker's recovery, as they might be replaced rather than assisted. Daley added that a paralegal injured while working unpaid at his firm would still be covered by workers' compensation insurance, emphasizing his commitment to pay for such work despite the legal violation.

Rep. Kinkead thanked the testifiers and representatives for their participation in today's hearing. She emphasized the importance of wage theft and looked forward to addressing the issue soon.



## **Senate Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with PDE**

*2/26/25, 9:30 a.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Department of Education.

The Department of Education (PDE) was represented by:

- Dr. Carrie Rowe, acting secretary, PDE,
- Jessica Sites, director, Bureau of Financial Operations, PDE,
- Lynette Kuhn, deputy secretary, Postsecondary and Higher Education, PDE, and
- Shante' Brown, deputy secretary, Child Development and Early Learning, PDE.

Chairman Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) introduced representatives from PDE and mentioned PDE's proposed budget of \$19.8 billion. He presented the first round of questioning and specified time allotments for members.

Sen. Joe Pittman (R-Indiana) greeted PDE staff and asked about a quote Sec. Rowe made in a recent House Appropriations budget hearing, "I think it's a more complicated issue than simply adding additional funding." Sec. Rowe recognized her quote but discussed the need for a holistic approach to improve education outcomes. Sen. Pittman highlighted the Shapiro administration's budget proposal, which includes a \$606 million increase in education funding, questioning the fairness of its distribution. Sec. Rowe questioned if Sen. Pittman was referring to the adequacy and tax equity funding, which Sen. Pittman confirmed. Sec. Rowe explained that the funding distribution follows a legislative formula designed to prioritize schools in greatest need. She added the purpose of the tax equity is to decrease school taxes "where the local effort seems to be in excess, or greater than, 66% of the commonwealth." Sen. Pittman mentioned that the only way to reduce taxes would be to mandate that the allocated dollars be used explicitly as a tax offset. Sec. Rowe mentioned there are four options aimed toward the discussed goal.

Sen. Pittman expressed concerns that the current system penalizes school districts for keeping taxes low. He stated school districts are incentivized to increase their property taxes in order to benefit from a "magical formula of adequacy." Sec. Rowe emphasized PDE's goal of achieving equity in education for all students. Sen. Pittman questioned the fairness of a proposal where only 152 school districts would receive 3% of increased funding. Sec. Rowe mentioned the focus on supporting historically underfunded schools. Sen. Pittman questioned the definition of "underfunded" schools, noting a statewide loss of 65,000 students but a 60% increase in subsidies. Sec. Rowe noted the need for fair funding according to the Constitution and a recently developed formula to create an even playing field.

Sen. Pittman questioned the fairness of the governor's proposed funding increase distribution. Sec. Rowe explained that the history of state funding reveals a growing gap between schools, which the adequacy funding aims to address. Sen. Pittman criticized the Basic Education Funding Commission (BEFC) report and the adequacy funding formula, arguing it treats school districts unfairly and highlighted the complexity and confusion caused by varying property tax efforts. He mentioned a Commonwealth Court ruling that mandated a better funding method without specifying a formula. Sen. Pittman specified that the Commonwealth Court ruling did not give a fixed funding amount for schools and emphasized that the issue isn't solely about financial resources. Sec. Rowe responded by acknowledging Sen. Pittman's preference for an equity-based approach to school funding and indicated her support for providing schools with what they need based on specific metrics. Sen. Pittman expressed frustration over the focus on funding formulas rather than educational outcomes, criticizing the disparity in the governor's proposal for school funding and the lack of improvement in literacy and math results despite increased funding.

Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Northumberland), chairman, Senate Education Committee, shared her commitment to education, emphasizing the importance of focusing on individual student growth and workforce development. She expressed concern over poor performance in math and reading, the decrease in student enrollment, and the increase in education spending without corresponding results. Sen. Culver asked if Sec. Rowe and the governor would commit to implementing structured literacy and reading interventions across all schools. Sec. Rowe responded by emphasizing literacy as a crucial aspect of education and announcing the creation of the Reading Leadership Council to evaluate and recommend literacy resources. She supported the use of universal screeners to identify students with reading difficulties and committed to a multi-pronged approach to improve literacy.

Sen. Culver asked if the structured literacy programs could be implemented in schools by next fall, to which Sec. Rowe mentioned that many schools have already started moving towards implementation. Sen. Culver inquired if PDE monitors their funding utilization, which Sec. Rowe affirmatively. Sen. Culver also asked if the budget's modest increase for career and technical education (CTE) would be sufficient to address the student waitlist for these programs. Sec. Rowe mentioned that the waitlist could potentially be addressed by implementing programs that do not require significant equipment, allowing funding to be directed towards creating additional spaces for students, especially in rural Pennsylvania. Sen. Culver inquired if Sec. Rowe had the data for the waitlist. Sec. Rowe apologized for not having the requested information but promised to gather it and send it after the hearing.

Sen. Culver asked Sec. Rowe for her opinion on additional measures needed for educational programs and workforce demands. Sec. Rowe discussed the lack of a Career and Technical Center (CTC) in Wayne and Pike counties, advocating for building expansion and collaboration with local workforce boards to meet employment needs. Sen. Culver highlighted the importance of CTE programs in her district.

Sen. Lindsey Williams (D-Allegheny), minority chairman, Senate Education Committee, expressed concerns about the lack of guidance from PDE in response to federal actions, leaving school districts facing potential litigation expenses. She asked about PDE's plans to provide guidance on federal education policy and funding changes. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the challenges of providing guidance amid fluctuating federal directives and promised clearer guidance in the future. Sen. Williams inquired about how PDE recommends districts proceed when federal and state directions contradict, especially regarding civil rights and education compliance. Sec. Rowe advised that districts should comply with the law and consult with their solicitor or pooled counsel for legal advice. Sen. Williams asked if PDE is prepared to assist school districts with these issues, to which Sec. Rowe responded affirmatively.

Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York) inquired about the administration's stance on fairness in women's sports, referencing an executive order by President Donald Trump and a policy update by the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA). Sec. Rowe said PDE "doesn't deal with sports or extracurriculars in schools," noting that PIAA is most often the agency giving oversight for school districts regarding those issues. Sen. Phillips-Hill asked Sec. Rowe for a clearer position on the federal executive order, to which Sec. Rowe responded that her administration's position is to follow the law.

Sen. Tim Kearney (D-Delaware) expressed concern about the Trump administration's goal of dismantling the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and asked for an overview of PDE's functions. Sec. Rowe highlighted the "catastrophic" consequences of such an action, noting PDE's role in distributing \$1.6 billion in funding, providing technical assistance and ensuring fair education. "The detriment of closing the Department of Education at the U.S. level, I suppose I could go on and on, but will be felt for quite a while," she said. "The intricacies, the interconnectedness of what they provide to us, is something that has been created over many decades, and it won't take that long to dismantle, and I'm not sure it can ever be put back together quite the same way again."

Sen. Kearney inquired about the specific effects on students if ED were shut down, noting the poor classroom conditions he witnessed. Sec. Rowe discussed the potential loss of crucial guidance, technical support and oversight, which could lead to increased class sizes, inadequately prepared teachers and higher dropout rates, especially among students with disabilities.

Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) discussed the importance of public libraries and the issue of stagnant funding for them in Beaver County. He inquired about discussions for increased funding. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the importance of libraries and mentioned a \$70 million public library subsidy for the year, with considerations for relaxing some regulations to provide more flexibility. Sen. Vogel then raised concerns about aging public libraries and school buildings needing maintenance and inquired about the allocation of \$143 million in the Planning and Construction Workbook (PlanCon) line item for school districts. Sec. Rowe noted that no new projects have been added to PlanCon since 2017, with only pre-existing projects eligible for funding, and mentioned additional facility funding provided through the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and PDE for infrastructure repairs.

Sen. Vogel inquired if PlanCon would be opened back up to use that \$143 million in funding. Sec. Rowe explained that projects already in the pipeline are eligible for funding. She noted that while PDE can't "unilaterally" reopen it, she offered to provide assistance and data to support the need for such funding. Sec. Rowe also mentioned a grant from PDE for lead and asbestos abatement and suggested that DCED could offer similar support for their grants.

Sen. Judy Schwank (D-Berks) observed population growth in her represented areas, leading to new school constructions, and expressed concern about the potential loss of PDE's functions, particularly in educational research and data collection, and asked about the impact on Pennsylvania. Sec. Rowe discussed the importance of federal funding for educational research and professional development. She emphasized the significance of over \$1 billion in federal funds to Pennsylvania's higher education research institutions and warned that losing even a portion of this funding could be detrimental.

Sen. Schwank emphasized the critical importance of the function spanning from pre-kindergarten to higher education for Pennsylvania and mentioned her concerns about PDE's role in assessing student performance in Pennsylvania. Sec. Rowe discussed the differences between the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores and Pennsylvania's own Keystone and the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams, emphasizing the importance of looking beyond proficiency rates to assess student growth.

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R-Lackawanna) highlighted the importance of providing a world-class education and noted troubling trends where increased education spending has not led to improved student outcomes. She asked about the key factors drawing families

to cyber charter schools and inquired about additional steps to improve student proficiencies under the current leadership. Sec. Rowe responded to concerns about stagnant student outcomes despite increased education spending by suggesting that spending has been inadequate for over a generation. Sec. Rowe also acknowledged Sen. Brown's statement about declining educational outcomes and attributed some of the challenges to the pandemic. She expressed optimism about improvements in literacy scores due to a shift towards structured literacy programs. Sen. Brown asserted teachers "are very frustrated with the system."

Sen. Arthur Haywood (D-Montgomery) emphasized the importance of the entire budget picture, mentioning \$8.2 billion for basic education funding and an additional \$500 million for adequacy and equity. He asked about funding for the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn), to which Sites responded that there was no specific funding in their budget for the university. Sen. Haywood raised concerns from a special education parents advisory meeting in Abington School District about potential changes affecting special education students, especially if ED shuts down. Sec. Rowe emphasized the Shapiro administration's commitment to education and the need for clarity before making plans. Sen. Haywood noted upcoming legislation he is proposing with Sen. Devlin Robinson (R-Allegheny) and Sen. John Kane (D-Delaware) to install lead filters in schools and asked about the risks of lead exposure. Sec. Rowe said while that isn't in her area of expertise, she is aware of long-lasting health problems associated with lead exposure.

Sen. Patty Kim (D-Dauphin) highlighted the positive impact of the previous year's budget increase on full-day kindergarten availability and asked a series of questions related to education funding and its effects. She asked Sec. Rowe about the increase in bus transportation costs and the difficulty in finding bus drivers, which Sec. Rowe confirmed. Sen. Kim also inquired whether superintendents are required to pay cyber charter school tuition, to which Sec. Rowe also confirmed. Sen. Kim highlighted a \$3 million budget shortfall in a smaller school district in her district, equal to their cyber charter tuition payment, and questioned if the special education student population is growing. Sec. Rowe responded, "Yes."

Sen. Kim further asked about the impact of the growing special education population on state exam scores, which Sec. Rowe confirmed they do impact test scores. Sen. Kim then mentioned a school district that paid \$380,000 for just two special education students. Sen. Kim inquired about the difficulty in hiring more teachers and the issuance of emergency teacher certificates, with Sec. Rowe mentioning that 18,000 emergency permits were issued. Sen. Kim also raised concerns about the need for school building upgrades and the requirement for active shooter drills, as well as the increase in behavioral issues among students.

Sen. Greg Rothman (R-Cumberland) asked Sec. Rowe about Gov. Josh Shapiro's stance on the Lifeline Scholarship Program, noting the absence of this in the governor's budget. He inquired about Sec. Rowe's personal position and discussions with the governor regarding the Lifeline Scholarship Program and tuition, especially in failing schools. Sec. Rowe stated that the scholarship program is not managed by PDE. Sen. Rothman mentioned that the governor line-item vetoed the provision for the program in the 2023 budget, to which Sec. Rowe reiterated that it does not flow through PDE. Sen. Rothman then asked Sec. Rowe about her discussions with the governor regarding the Lifeline Scholarship Program, to which she responded that she had not discussed it since it was not part of the current proposal and she had only been in her position for seven days. She further suggested directing specific funding questions to the budget secretary or DCED.

Sen. Rothman then raised concerns about the cessation of full-time kindergarten at Cumberland Valley High School in his district, despite a 20% enrollment increase and a \$30 million adequacy gap, questioning why the school received no state support. Sec. Rowe specified that Cumberland Valley was not singled out, as 152 districts did not receive funding. Sen. Rothman highlighted the significant enrollment increase at Cumberland Valley, and Sen. Rowe acknowledged the fluctuation in school district populations. Sen. Rothman then asked about delays in tax refunds for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program participants, noting eight-month delays. Sec. Rowe stated that the EITC program is managed by DCED rather than PDE. Sen. Rothman emphasized the importance of the Lifeline Scholarship Program and the EITC program, urging Sec. Rowe to take an interest in these issues. Sec. Rowe noted that while she has concerns for those issues, they are "likely better addressed by the entity that is distributing that funding."

Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D-Montgomery) inquired about the public school system's obligation to provide special education, to which Sec. Rowe mentioned that all students have certain rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires students to receive a free and appropriate education. Sen. Cappelletti asked for details on the annual IDEA funding received by Pennsylvania school systems and its utilization. Sec. Rowe responded that \$600 million is received annually for IDEA funds, distributed to schools for advancements in special education services, individualized education programs (IEPs), assistive technology and professional development for teachers.

Sen. Cappelletti then asked about the average percentage of a school district's special education expenditures covered by federal funds. Sites responded that special education expenditures were approximately \$5 billion, with \$600 million in IDEA funds, representing about 10% of the total. Sen. Cappelletti then inquired about the implications for students with specific learning disabilities if ED were closed. Sec. Rowe emphasized the Shapiro administration's commitment to supporting students with disabilities. Sen. Cappelletti further asked if PDE could oversee compliance with IDEA and monitor IEPs if ED was closed, to which Sec. Rowe suggested that state education agencies might assume these duties but stated PDE could not handle this with its current

resources. Sen. Cappelletti also asked about the consequences of reducing special education budgets by 10%, and Sec. Rowe outlined potential negative impacts such as lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates among students with disabilities and increased financial burden on local taxpayers.

Sen. Joe Picozzi (R-Philadelphia) inquired about the proposed budget for the School Safety and Security Committee (SSSC), specifically regarding physical and mental health funds distribution. Sec. Rowe stated that these funds are now managed by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). Sen. Picozzi also asked for updates on school safety progress and expressed concern for safety in his district, including transportation and incidents in school parking lots. He questioned Sec. Rowe about Gov. Shapiro's proposal to use revenue from vice taxes for state government spending, highlighting the contradiction of using such taxes while educating children against the behaviors taxed. Sec. Rowe stated that while she appreciates other sources of revenue for the state, she doesn't have a personal opinion on vice taxes beyond that.

Sen. Picozzi then asked for an update on the teacher shortage in Pennsylvania, including superintendents' perspectives and regional differences. Sec. Rowe described the teacher shortage, noting regional differences and the issuance of about 18,000 emergency permits. She highlighted the need for approximately 20,000 teachers due to the annual requirement of 2,020 to 2,500 new teachers and the exit of current teachers. Sen. Picozzi then asked about the difficulty of retaining teachers. Sec. Rowe described teacher retention as a significant problem, especially during the first to fifth years of teaching, and emphasized the importance of understanding teachers' needs. Sen. Picozzi inquired about the number of applications for open teaching positions, to which Sec. Rowe responded that PDE does not collect such data and could not provide an immediate answer.

Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Berks) asked about the governor's proposal of an \$8,000 flat rate tuition for non-special education students attending public cyber charter schools. Sec. Rowe explained that the \$8,000 rate likely exceeds the minimum amount school districts pay, suggesting it should be adequate for a comprehensive education. Sen. Pennycuick acknowledged Sec. Rowe's lack of involvement in the decision regarding the tuition rate and then inquired about the allocation of an additional \$6 million to adult and family literacy programs, totaling \$22.7 million. Sec. Rowe explained that the need for these programs has not increased, but their utilization has risen by over 20%. Kuhn added that the funds would support hiring full-time teachers to help students prepare for secondary commonwealth diploma testing and entering the workforce.

Sen. Pennycuick questioned the effectiveness of education funding, highlighting concerns about students graduating without basic literacy skills. Sec. Rowe stated the issue is more complex and involves addressing the workforce skills gap, not just the lack of high school diplomas. Sen. Pennycuick questioned the need for \$22 million in adult literacy and stated, "If our schools did the job, we wouldn't need this money." Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of adult literacy in Pennsylvania, advocating for additional funding for adult education and family literacy. She stressed the need to support adults who lack literacy skills, highlighting the state's responsibility to those who did not receive adequate literacy education during their schooling years.

Chairman Martin announced the end of round one and the commencement of round two of questions, allocating time for standing committee chairs and members.

Sen. Culver expressed concerns about the need for parity in accountability and regulations among all public schools, referencing recent performance audits on charter schools. She asked for a list detailing areas in the charter school law where parity should be achieved. Sec. Rowe agreed to provide a list of areas where parity between charter schools and other public schools can be achieved and mentioned that achieving parity in funding between traditional and cyber schools is essential. Sen. Culver discussed the absence of the Lifeline Scholarship or other similar programs from the current budget, expressing confusion over the discrepancy between the governor's support for such programs and their absence in the proposed budget. Sec. Rowe explained that the budget proposal focuses on the immediate needs of current public schools, aiming for stability in funding to improve student outcomes over time. She stated she is open to reviewing any legislative proposals regarding the scholarship program and offered to provide input and support.

Sen. Culver shifted the discussion to student-teacher stipends, mentioning the distribution of \$30 million and the governor's proposal of an additional \$40 million and questioning the absence of family income requirements for recipients. Sec. Rowe asserted that there are no family income requirements for student teacher stipend recipients and acknowledged the significance of the funding in aiding students' success by allowing them to focus on their student teaching. She noted that out of 4,000 applicants, 2,000 received funding. Sen. Culver asked whether there are safeguards to ensure the \$10,000 or \$15,000 given to each student is spent on essential expenses. Sec. Rowe said there is "no spring break" for those doing student teaching, expressing that it was "among the most difficult things that I've done in my professional life." She humorously added, "That is, perhaps, until today."

Sen. Culver then discussed the need to expand access to dual enrollment courses and asked if there would be support for allowing community colleges and other institutions to offer three-year bachelor's degrees focused only on essential coursework. Sec. Rowe expressed strong support for educational innovation, highlighting programs that allow high school students to earn credits towards a teaching certificate and initiatives that credential individuals as special education teachers in just 18 months.

Sen. Phillips-Hill inquired about the taxpayer investment in the State Board of Higher Education, detailing the salaries of the board's staff and questioning whether the board's staffing and expenses reflect bloat and waste in higher education. Sec. Rowe acknowledged Sen. Phillips-Hill's concerns but disagreed with the notion of bloat and waste. Sen. Phillips-Hill mentioned that over \$2 million has been spent on staffing for an advisory board to the General Assembly. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the salaries and mentioned that the board is limited to fewer positions than other states, mentioning Kentucky and Virginia as examples. Sen. Phillips-Hill emphasized that Pennsylvania should find its own solutions and noted that the Senate Appropriations Committee had not received a response about the State Board of Higher Education's budget. Sec. Rowe agreed to provide the committee with the budget and expressed the intention to offer a rationale for the salaries and staff size, along with comparisons to other states. She also mentioned that the total budget for fiscal year 2024-2025 is \$3.5 million.

Sen. Phillips-Hill then asked about the funding allocated for the State Board of Higher Education in the governor's budget for fiscal year 2025-2026, to which Sites mentioned that the cost to carry is approximately \$1.8 million additional dollars and is for two staffing positions. Sen. Phillips-Hill asked about the total budget for the current fiscal year they were discussing, and Sites mentioned that the budget includes about 2.2 million dollars. Sen. Phillips-Hill asked why PDE has not responded to inquiries from the Senate Appropriations Committee staff. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the legitimacy of Sen. Phillips-Hill's inquiries regarding the State Board of Higher Education budget and admitted her inability to provide immediate answers due to her recent appointment. She committed to delivering all requested information, including a copy of the budget and the rationale behind it, to facilitate informed decision-making.

Sen. Kearney revisited a topic introduced by a colleague regarding funding for facilities, expressing concern over school districts in his area facing challenges in building new facilities due to frozen federal funding. He sought clarity on how to advise school districts moving forward amidst these funding uncertainties. Sec. Rowe expressed concern about a school district potentially being unable to complete a building project due to lack of funding, highlighting the importance of PlanCon for such situations. She mentioned steps taken to provide funding for essential school needs like heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) and lead abatement, acknowledging that the demand exceeds available funds. Sec. Rowe emphasized the need to quantify these needs through data to support the usefulness of programs like PlanCon. She also noted collaboration with federal partners to address needs in districts with low-income students, suggesting that expanding such efforts could be beneficial.

Sen. Kearney then discussed the adequacy and tax equity funding and requested examples of how districts across the commonwealth utilized the one-year investment to enhance opportunities for students. Sec. Rowe detailed how the legislation's funding has been utilized by schools, including transitioning from half-day to full-day kindergarten, enhancing school security with panic buttons and audio systems, improving curriculum with structured literacy and preparing students for new Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy and Sustainability (STEELS) standards. She also mentioned the support for science, technology, engineering and dual credit programs, highlighting the broad academic benefits facilitated by the funding. Sen. Kearney asked if there have been increases in mental health programs and staffing. Sec. Rowe responded, "Absolutely." She described improvements in the western part of the state, highlighting a school district filling four out of five counselor positions and the hiring of an elementary art teacher and a high school music teacher/band director for the first time in 15 and 30 years, respectively. She emphasized the benefits to student opportunities and community pride.

Sen. Brown discussed the impact of mental health on children's learning and asked about additional mental health funding beyond PCCD funding and grants. Sec. Rowe noted she was not aware of any additional funding but would provide information if available later. Sen. Brown then inquired about efforts to receive federal money for mental health services in schools. Sec. Rowe stated that adequacy funding, of which 23% is spent on physical and mental health issues by school districts, could be used for this purpose. Sen. Brown expressed concern about the unequal distribution of adequacy funding among schools.

Sec. Rowe explained that all school districts receive the Ready to Learn (RTL) block grant, but only some get additional adequacy funding due to historical underfunding. Sen. Brown raised concerns about mental health disorders among K-12 students and asked about PDE's collaboration with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and county mental health services. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of enhancing interagency connections and the positive relationship with DHS. Sen. Brown then inquired about a standardized system for transferring sensitive student records between schools. Sec. Rowe stated there is no standardized method for this, adding that social security numbers are not required for admission. Sen. Brown expressed concerns about data breaches during the transfer of student records. Sec. Rowe acknowledged the issue of data compromise and the need for improved policies to prevent breaches.

Sen. Schwank discussed the Pre-K Counts program, its efficiency in filling slots, and concerns about the teacher shortage. Sec. Rowe explained that additional funding will increase the amount per seat to help raise teacher salaries. Sen. Schwank further mentioned the importance of supporting pre-K teachers' advancement through further education and professional development, highlighting the need to build capacity in the workforce. Brown agreed and noted the organization's willingness to share resources

and supports available under DHS for the early learning sector. Sen. Schwank praised the efforts of United Way in Berks County for mentoring individuals in the early learning field and expressed her willingness to support and enhance these programs.

Minority Chairman Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the critical state of education funding in Pennsylvania, noting that 348 school districts, educating 70% of the state's students, have been unconstitutionally and inadequately funded for generations. He detailed the poor conditions of school facilities and the importance of grade-level reading and math. Chairman Hughes raised concerns about a federal plan to reduce public education funding by \$330 billion over nine years, questioning the impact on Pennsylvania and specifically on Title I funding. Sec. Rowe explained that Title I provides financial support to schools with a high concentration of low-income students, focusing on delivering high-quality education in reading and, in some instances, math. Chairman Hughes discussed the impact of Title I on the 348 school districts and 70% of Pennsylvania's children, suggesting hope for improvement. He also mentioned that the funding aimed at addressing grade-level reading and NAEP scores would be reduced due to recent federal action.

Chairman Hughes asked Sec. Rowe to explain what IDEA is, to which she responded that it is a federal law designed to ensure students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. She further explained that students with disabilities might have learning discrepancies or other issues requiring extra support to access the curriculum. Chairman Hughes emphasized the importance of providing resources to students with disabilities to ensure they receive an appropriate and necessary education. He then asked whether students with disabilities have been appropriately funded by federal government money, highlighting the risk of cuts to this funding. Sec. Rowe responded that federal funding for students with disabilities covers only 8-10% of special education expenditures in the state, with the rest funded by the state or local taxpayers.

Chairman Hughes then asked if this 8-10% funding was the full amount intended by federal law, specifically for IDEA, and requested a specific figure for full funding from federal partners. Sites said that the current total expenditure for school districts is approximately \$5.8 billion. She added that the state provides approximately \$1.9 billion for school funding, with the remainder coming from federal and local sources. Chairman Hughes highlighted that IDEA was expected to be funded at 40% by the federal government but has only reached 8%, emphasizing the importance of federal funding for services and infrastructure, especially given the age of the country's school infrastructure. He cited an old school in Allentown built in the 1870s as an example of the need for federal support in school infrastructure projects. Sec. Rowe mentioned that while some grant funding for infrastructure is received, it is not sufficient to meet needs.

Chairman Hughes asked about the significance of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) within ED to which Sec. Rowe explained its role in addressing injustices in schools by enforcing civil rights laws. Chairman Hughes emphasized the necessity of having a federal entity to protect students and ensure fair treatment, particularly in disciplinary situations. He expressed concerns about the recent vote to reduce ED's budget by \$330 billion and its impact on federal support for school children and educators, asking how the state could manage these financial challenges and what steps would be taken if another round of appropriations hearings is needed. Sec. Rowe stated it is "uncharted territory."

Chairman Hughes contested the idea that the country is in uncharted territory regarding educational funding, pointing out the historical challenges in providing adequate and constitutional funding for all children. He emphasized that 70% of children have been affected by these issues and warned of the potential loss of civil rights, IDEA protections and federal education funding, including teacher recruitment, due to decisions in Washington, D.C. Chairman Hughes highlighted the risk of Pennsylvania facing property tax increases to offset the loss of approximately \$2.8 billion annually from the federal government if these cuts proceed. He further inquired, "Do we lose that, or does it get made up?" Chairman Hughes acknowledged it might be a better question for the budget secretary, to which Sec. Rowe responded, "That's a great idea."

Chairman Martin thanked Chairman Hughes for his comments and questioning before recessing for lunch.



## **Senate Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing PDE**

*02/26/25, 1:30 p.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a continuation of its budget hearing with the Department of Education.

The Department of Education (PDE) was represented by:

- Dr. Carrie Rowe, acting secretary, PDE,
- Jessica Sites, director, Bureau of Financial Operations, PDE,
- Lynette Kuhn, deputy secretary, Postsecondary and Higher Education, PDE, and
- Shante' Brown, deputy secretary, Child Development and Early Learning, PDE.

Chairman Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) announced the continuation of the Appropriations Committee hearings.

Sen. Lindsey Williams (D-Allegheny), minority chairman, Senate Education Committee, emphasized the need for increased investments in public education, expressing concern over Gov. Josh Shapiro's proposal for only \$75 million in basic education funding and suggesting the under-subscribed Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program (OSTC) tax credits as potential sources for the additional \$125 million needed. Sec. Rowe confirmed that private schools are not required to admit every child or serve students with disabilities. Sen. Williams praised Gov. Shapiro's budget proposal for increasing early childhood educator wages, sharing concerns about the sector's low wages and urging for actions to ensure higher wages to maintain accessible child care. Sec. Rowe agreed on the importance of early childhood education and the need for wages comparable to K-12 counterparts.

Sen. Williams shared her experience with the financial struggles of early childhood educators, emphasizing the importance of investing in this area. Brown highlighted the goal of increasing wages for pre-K Counts program workers to improve their salaries and benefits. Sen. Williams expressed satisfaction with the focus on staffing issues in early childhood education and hoped for additional funding in the final budget.

Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) asked about the 18,000 emergency certificates distributed last year. Sec. Rowe confirmed that 18,000 individuals received an emergency permit. She acknowledged the challenges in teacher certification, especially in finding specialized teachers for subjects like physics and certain areas of math beyond the fifth and sixth grades. Sen. Vogel highlighted the broader issue of teacher certification and availability, particularly in specialized subjects such as geology, higher math and physics. Sec. Rowe emphasized the need for innovation in addressing the challenges of filling difficult teaching positions and expressed her willingness to collaborate on potential certification changes, noting a decline in the number of teachers graduating from Pennsylvania's programs to about 5,500 a year.

Sen. Vogel inquired about the retention of 142 special education teachers in Pennsylvania. Sec. Rowe confirmed the retention rate, highlighting a program that allows individuals with a bachelor's degree to become special education teachers in 18 months. Sen. Vogel asked about implementing a tiered system for funding special education students in cyber charter schools to save on school budgets. Sec. Rowe agreed with concerns about the inequities in cyber funding for special education, emphasizing steps taken in the previous year's budget that saved school districts about 9% and a current proposal that would allow regular education school districts to receive an additional \$378 million back in their budgets.

Sen. Greg Rothman (R-Cumberland) addressed the allocation of over \$600 million for education in the current budget, pointing out that Cumberland Valley High School and 151 other districts would receive less than \$20 million, or just 3% of this funding, questioning how this addresses the inequities between the schools. Sec. Rowe explained that directing funds to schools identified by the adequacy funding formula as underfunded for a long period does not imply that other schools do not need or would not benefit from increased funding. Sen. Rothman highlighted a decline of 300,000 children in Pennsylvania's public schools over two decades, with an expected further decrease of 60,000 in the next three years. He questioned the rationale behind increasing spending on public education and administration despite the decreasing number of students and suggested considering consolidations or eliminating the "hold harmless" policy. He criticized the focus on how education funds are distributed rather than on increasing overall funding. Sec. Rowe responded that the needs of the remaining students, especially post-pandemic, must be considered, as students faced significant challenges during that period.

Sen. Rothman mentioned that some had advocated for keeping students in schools during the pandemic to avoid isolation, showing foresight in their concerns. Sec. Rowe explained that reducing funding due to fewer students overlooks the increased needs of remaining students and the fixed nature of school infrastructure costs. She emphasized that schools have been underfunded for generations, necessitating continued financial support regardless of student population changes.

Sen. Rothman questioned the characterization of the public education system as "woefully underfunded," pointing out that the state ranks in the top five or six in the country for funding every year for the last 25 years and challenged the notion that funding is the primary issue. Sec. Rowe stressed that funding is crucial for repairing school buildings, paying teachers and providing necessary services for students with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of financial investment to achieve the desired quality of education. "You're not going to be able to provide the education that we want for our students unless you're willing to pay for it," she remarked. Sen. Rothman stated, "I would argue that we have, we are paying for it."

Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D-Montgomery) argued that comparing public education to private business "is a fallacy" because public education aims to serve the whole population, especially those who are least able to afford services. She highlighted potential savings from cyber charter reform, including a \$1.4 million savings in Norristown, and asked Sec. Rowe to discuss the impact of such reforms on underserved districts. Sec. Rowe explained that implementing cyber charter reforms would allow underserved school districts to offer a cyber component to their education system at a cost of about \$3,000 per comprehensive cyber education. She highlighted the financial benefits of these reforms, noting a \$378 million savings from the \$8,000 tuition for cyber Special Education that started in January, expected to save \$95 million and a 9% savings in expenditures from a transition subsidy in the previous school year. Sen. Cappelletti asked if underfunded or underserved school districts would benefit the most from the proposed changes. Sec. Rowe stated that they would be helped the most, underscoring that all school districts would receive a benefit under that change.

Sen. Cappelletti discussed the benefits of savings for both high-performing and underfunded school districts, using Norristown as an example, and asked for a comparison between the fund reserves of traditional public schools and cyber charter schools. Sec. Rowe explained that cyber charter schools have lower facility needs than traditional districts, which justifies the latter's higher fund balances, typically 8% to 10%. She also noted that perceptions of fund balance excessiveness arise when they reach around 40% without corresponding facility needs.

Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Berks) asked for a definition of success in K-12 education. Sec. Rowe responded that it involves providing students with necessary supports and resources, emphasizing the importance of qualified teachers for the most needy students. Sen. Pennycuick criticized the focus on increasing funding without addressing student proficiency in reading and math, noting that a significant percentage of Pennsylvania students are not proficient in these subjects by fourth and eighth grades.

Sen. Joe Pittman (R-Indiana) acknowledged Sec. Rowe's extensive experience in education and discussed cyber charter school reforms and the importance of recognizing savings in education funding discussions. Sec. Rowe discussed the Commonwealth Court's decision on the unconstitutional funding of schools and the benefits of additional funding for meeting student needs.

Sen. Pittman highlighted that school districts are being saved \$95 million in recurring costs, emphasizing the importance of recognizing these savings in funding discussions. Sec. Rowe stated that when money is not paid out, it can be used to support the needs of the students within the buildings. Sen. Pittman argued that the education fee would be recognized as a savings and be part of that conversation. Sec. Rowe responded that recognizing the savings is important but that it is not an equal distribution of the funding. Sen. Pittman stated that Gov. Shapiro's plan is not an equal distribution either. Sec. Rowe explained that the formula is drawing money to schools that need it most based on the elements in the formula. Sen. Pittman noted that those elements were not provided by the court but by the Basic Education Funding Commission (BEFC). Sec. Rowe agreed, stating that both the House and the Senate supported the measure, showing collective agreement.

Sen. Pittman highlighted the use of census data for funding allocations and the importance of considering both financial inputs and outputs in education funding, referring to the Commonwealth Court ruling. Sec. Rowe asked for clarification on the discussion about outputs, indicating metrics for evaluating school district efficiency. Sen. Pittman discussed the court ruling's criticism of the current funding system and the need for a solution that might not involve increased funding. Sec. Rowe pointed to improvements in test scores, career readiness and a modest increase in college attendance, viewing these as positive developments.

Sen. Pittman expressed concern about Penn State's evaluation of branch campuses and potential repurposing decisions. Sec. Rowe stated that the executive director of the State Board of Higher Education would discuss the next steps for the branch campuses.

Sen. Pittman asked about the status of in-person versus remote work. Sec. Rowe listed the department's part-time telework status, with varying in-office requirements based on job roles. Sen. Pittman requested a detailed breakdown of the telework and in-person schedule and its impact on physical space. Sec. Rowe explained PDE's move to the Forum Building for efficiency and cost savings, detailing how they compressed operations to occupy fewer floors and facilitate a modern work environment conducive to hiring talent statewide.

Sen. Sharif Street (D-Philadelphia) asked to confirm if districts historically received varied funding and if better-funded districts showed higher performance, which Sec. Rowe confirmed. Sen. Street emphasized the need to address funding inequities and expressed support for using union labor in school construction while also exploring cost-effective measures by allowing contractors to bid on multiple project parts. Sec. Rowe expressed openness to improving school construction processes by evaluating potential changes to the bidding process, offering departmental data and expertise for discussions. Sen. Street thanked Sec. Rowe and mentioned he would arrange further discussions on school construction bidding. He then inquired about PDE's efforts in advancing career technical education (CTE) programs, highlighting the demand for skilled trades over traditional college paths. Sec. Rowe highlighted the high demand for CTE programs and the efforts to align them with workforce needs to reduce the skilled labor gap. She emphasized the goal of attracting companies to Pennsylvania by providing skilled labor from CTEs and noted the lack of CTE facilities in Wayne and Pike Counties.

Sen. Street thanked PDE for its educational quality improvement efforts and highlighted funding disparities across districts, stressing the economic factors driving these inequities. He acknowledged the court mandate to address funding issues and appreciated efforts to bridge the educational funding gap.

Sen. Art Haywood (D-Montgomery) questioned the impact of eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion programs (DEI) or school breakfast programs on literacy and math proficiency. He specifically asked, "Will that improve the literacy or math proficiency of our students?" Sec. Rowe responded, "No." Sen. Haywood then asked if increasing African American male teachers would improve student proficiency. Sec. Rowe affirmed the benefits of having teachers reflect their community's demographics.

Sen. Haywood used a hypothetical scenario to discuss the impact of inconsistent financial support, questioning the effectiveness of temporary increases in educational funding. Sec. Rowe emphasized the importance of stability and predictability in financial support. Sen. Haywood shared his skepticism about the impact of inconsistent educational support based on his personal experience, questioning the effectiveness of short-term funding increases on educational proficiency. Sec. Rowe reiterated that predictability and stability in funding is an essential part of what PDE does.

Sen. Haywood expressed concern about Penn State closing branch campuses near state universities and asked about the new State Board of Higher Education's role in addressing competition between higher education systems. Sec. Rowe confirmed her role on the board and emphasized the importance of reducing competition by fostering collaboration among the four sectors of higher education. Sen. Haywood asked, "Are you, in your role on that board, taking into account the proximity of the branch campuses to the state university, so that the competition between the two can be reduced?" Sec. Rowe emphasized reducing competition "anywhere we can" and highlighted additional collaboration amongst the four sectors in higher education in a distributive leadership model.

Sen. Joe Picozzi (R-Philadelphia) inquired about the availability of educator workforce data dashboards as mandated by [Act 35 of 2023](#), which provide information on educator supply, demand, retention and preparation program outcomes. Sec. Rowe confirmed the existence of a data dashboard and expressed a desire to enhance it with visual components for better analysis and user engagement. Sen. Picozzi encouraged PDE to partner with research universities to develop a more advanced data dashboard and stressed the importance of improving data accessibility for targeted investments in education.

Sen. Patty Kim (D-Dauphin) discussed the challenges faced by teachers and superintendents, including physical injuries from students and additional mandates, and asked Sec. Rowe if she empathized with educators' desire to focus on teaching core subjects without extra burdens. Sec. Rowe agreed with the sentiments and emphasized the importance of evaluating new mandates critically. Sen. Kim also asked about the preference for external mental health support for students over in-house services. Sec. Rowe underscored the importance of keeping students in their home schools with adequate support.

Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Northumberland) inquired about data on students identified with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) after leaving public schools for cyber charter schools, highlighting concerns about cyber charter funding and its impact on public schools. Sec. Rowe stated that PDE cannot collect new data unless there is a provision of law that says otherwise. Sen. Culver expressed concerns about the financial implications for schools regarding students with IEPs transferring to cyber charter schools and the potential misuse of taxpayer funds. She emphasized the need to address any improper practices and raised concerns about the integration of artificial intelligence in education, questioning the need for more guidelines to ensure students develop critical thinking and writing skills alongside technology use. Sec. Rowe agreed on the importance of students learning to use technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), appropriately. She described teaching methods that use AI to stimulate student engagement and critical thinking by having students evaluate and improve AI-generated content.

Sen. Culver discussed concerns about students submitting AI-generated papers and suggested the need for guidelines to prevent misuse. She also questioned if there are barriers to industry partnerships with educational institutions for workforce development. Sec. Rowe explained that incorporating hands-on learning in education is an excellent idea for maintaining engagement and building the workforce. She added that PDE is moving in the right direction regarding apprenticeships and is working on pathways to reduce

barriers such as time and money to integrate individuals into the workforce more quickly. Sen. Culver expressed eagerness to collaborate on educational reforms with stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents and educators.

Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York) requested clarification on the funds appropriated and spent for the State Board of Higher Education in the current fiscal year, noting confusion in the numbers. Sites explained that for fiscal year 2024-2025, the State Board of Higher Education has a budget of approximately \$3.5 million, with \$3 million allocated from prior year General Government Operating (GGO) funds for one-time costs and personnel costs covered through a cost-to-carry approach using surplus GGO dollars.

Sen. Phillips-Hill asked about the budgeting plans for the next fiscal year and inquired about the actions taken by the board since its organization in September. Sec. Rowe stated that at their last meeting, the board passed a draft strategic plan and plans to hold five or six meetings across the state to gather input on the draft goals of this plan, noting that there are currently 1.7 million students in Pennsylvania. Sen. Phillips-Hill asked how many employees the board will have. Sec. Rowe replied that it will have six employees in the future but currently does not. Sen. Phillips-Hill expressed her intention to discuss the formation of an advisory board to the General Assembly.

Sen. Timothy Kearney (D-Delaware) asked about the impact of investments on small and rural school districts and learned that approximately 70% of rural schools are receiving the adequacy supplement. Sec. Rowe stated that there are 168 total rural schools, 115 of which receive the adequacy supplement. Sen. Kearney inquired if those districts are treated differently under the adequacy formula. Sec. Rowe responded that the formula aims to balance all schools equally. Sen. Kearney further questioned whether providing safe and adequate school facilities is a fundamental part of delivering a constitutionally compliant school funding system. Sec. Rowe confirmed it as the number one goal but mentioned the challenge in determining the sufficiency of funds for school district facilities without a clear understanding of the districts' needs.

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R-Lackawanna) asked if increased state funding guarantees a reduction in school property taxes. Sec. Rowe specified that additional funding does not necessarily lead to tax reductions. Sen. Brown asserted that "there are legislators that will claim that these dollars will definitively reduce school property taxes" and asked if the secretary found that to be true. Sec. Rowe noted the tax equity supplement aimed at districts ranking above the 66th percentile and said the tax equity supplement would help to reduce school property taxes. Sites listed specific allowable uses for funding, including mitigating or preventing an increase in real estate property taxes and expanding programs that supplement senior tax rebates. Sec. Rowe added that the tax equity supplement would reduce local taxes in all cases.

Sen. Judy Schwank (D-Berks) asked about the reduction in federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for addressing homeless students, emphasizing the need to distinguish between children in shelters with their parents and unattached youth living independently. Sec. Rowe explained how federal funding supports homeless youth, including those living with relatives due to economic hardship, by providing clothing, school necessities and transportation to allow students to continue their education in their former school districts. Sen. Schwank discussed the impact of funding on homelessness among students, referencing challenges faced by homeless youth in Reading, and expressed a desire to explore more efficient solutions. She indicated that she would like to continue the conversation to get a better and more efficient understanding of the issue.

Sen. Vogel asked for an update on the Commission of Agricultural Education Excellence and its funding in the current budget. Sec. Rowe mentioned that PDE partially funds the initiative, with funding split 50/50 between PDE and the Department of Agriculture (PDA). She also mentioned that the head of the Bureau of Career and Technical Education now leads the Commission. Sen. Vogel discussed the importance of Future Farmers of America (FFA) programs, STEM and CTE in agriculture education and inquired about funding or discussions regarding financial support for school mergers. Sec. Rowe expressed willingness to discuss school mergers and consolidations, acknowledging the financial struggles of schools and highlighting examples of resource sharing and administrative partnerships among districts.

Sen. Street asked about the impact of significant reductions or the complete elimination of federal funding for special education in Pennsylvania schools. Sec. Rowe described such a scenario as "devastating" and "catastrophic," noting it could lead to larger class sizes, higher dropout rates, more legal disputes and an increased financial burden on local communities. Sen. Street inquired whether federal cuts could also impact early intervention programs. Sec. Rowe confirmed that federal cuts would impact the Head Start program and early intervention programs. Sen. Street noted that federal cuts could also impact school meal programs and stressed the importance of being prepared for potential impacts on children.

Sen. Pittman asked to revisit a discussion about the distribution of state funding, highlighting the disparity between wealthy and poorer students. Sec. Rowe stated that well-funded districts often have better outcomes than underfunded ones.

Sen. Pittman revisited earlier discussions on the equity funding formula, noting that it is supposed to help poor kids catch up to their wealthier counterparts. Sec. Rowe explained that the funding formula aims to allocate funds to schools most in need. Sen. Pittman highlighted that 348 school districts are set to receive 97% of the proposed increase in Gov. Shapiro's budget, while 152 districts

will get only 3%, questioning the assumption about the distribution of rich and poor kids across these districts. Sec. Rowe argued that the funding has been inadequate based on the formula's elements. Sen. Pittman emphasized the presence of poor families within the 152 districts perceived as wealthier and argued against the current funding mindset. Sec. Rowe thanked Pittman for his stance and offered to provide data to address concerns about fund distribution. Sen. Pittman emphasized the need for a detailed discussion on the allocation of educational funds, focusing on fairness and equity.

Minority Chairman Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia) highlighted the significance of a Commonwealth Court decision related to K-12 education and mentioned a statement made by a lawyer opposing educational equity. Sec. Rowe acknowledged her awareness. Chairman Hughes noted that the public can find the exact day and time when the question about the necessity of all students being required to learn algebra was asked in court. Sec. Rowe asserted that the question was "disappointing at best" and "very offensive." Chairman Hughes criticized the notion that certain groups of students do not need educational support, emphasizing the generational impact of discriminatory thinking on communities due to unconstitutional and inadequate funding. He emphasized that the decision by court officials regarding education funding was not appealed to the state Supreme Court, implying acceptance of the decision. He inquired if Sec. Rowe was aware of BEFC and its efforts, including 14 hearings and testimonies from across Pennsylvania. Sec. Rowe confirmed her awareness and participation in the commission's activities.

Chairman Hughes highlighted the commission's website and its role in addressing discrimination and inadequate funding in education, questioning whether one year of following the commission's guidelines could resolve these issues. Sec. Rowe agreed that one year of funding would not be sufficient. Chairman Hughes discussed BEFC's recommendation for a six or seven-year plan to achieve constitutional funding levels, and Sec. Rowe acknowledged the challenge of closing the funding gap within a single year.

Chairman Hughes discussed the significant impact of a 2014 Commonwealth Court decision on Pennsylvania's education funding as a civil rights issue, emphasizing the need for legislative action to rectify underfunded conditions experienced by students throughout their K-12 education. He connected K-12 funding levels to higher education, suggesting better funding could prepare more students for college. Sec. Rowe highlighted the importance of preparing students for any career path. Chairman Hughes highlighted Pennsylvania's low ranking in K-12 funding and its effect on the number of students eligible for higher education or trade schools, pointing out the affordability issues with college education. He alluded to discussions in Washington D.C. about repealing certain student loan benefits, including the deduction of interest paid on student loans and the government paying interest while the borrower is in school full-time. Sec. Rowe stated that removing funds would complicate matters.

Chairman Hughes discussed the consideration of repealing the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC), questioning whether this would make it harder for families to afford college. Sec. Rowe confirmed that such changes would indeed make it more difficult for young people and their families.

Chairman Hughes discussed potential changes to educational financial aid and tax credits, emphasizing the impact on the affordability and accessibility of higher education. He asked for advice on addressing these issues in light of the proposed changes. Sec. Rowe shared the Shapiro administration and PDE's commitment to improving access, affordability and credential attainment in higher education, highlighting the efficiency of their services with less than \$20 per student funding. Chairman Hughes asked whether the proposed changes would hinder their goal of increasing access to higher education, to which Sec. Rowe responded that it would indeed make it harder.

Chairman Hughes then highlighted the negative impact of potentially taxing scholarships and Pell Grants, questioning how such measures align with educational goals, to which Sec. Rowe agreed, stating that taxing these would not help achieve their goals. Chairman Hughes stressed the importance of addressing educational inequity and inequality, mentioning a new initiative to support access to higher education and expressing concern over the potential negative impacts of changes being discussed in Washington, D.C.

Chairman Martin discussed Pennsylvania's financial and educational challenges, including a \$3.2 billion structural deficit and a \$19 billion education budget, emphasizing the need for equitable funding and criticizing the focus on funding levels over improving educational outcomes. He questioned the determination of a proposed \$8,000 rate for cyber charter schools. Sec. Rowe explained the rate was influenced by previous legislative action and comparison to the lowest amount a school district pays to a cyber charter for a regular education student. Chairman Martin indicated that numerous House bills proposing to increase the personal income tax were not supported by his side or the Senate and recalled former governor Tom Wolf's proposal for education funding of about \$9,500 per child. He asked Sec. Rowe if she was aware of this proposal, which Sec. Rowe confirmed.

Chairman Martin discussed the task given to the Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) to determine the true cost of cyber charter education, which was found to be \$14,000, significantly higher than previous estimates. He emphasized the need for a fair discussion on the funding of cyber charter schools. Sec. Rowe acknowledged that the cyber charter reimbursement was not included in the current budget proposal, which previously benefited school districts by about 9%, and added that proposed changes would benefit districts by approximately 34% or 35%.

Chairman Martin discussed the inefficiency of having 500 different funding formulas for virtual education and suggested a statewide rate to ensure fairness. He proposed an annual analysis of a fair rate to replace the current system. Sec. Rowe expressed interest in discussing a statewide rate for education funding and offered to provide data to assist in finding a solution. Chairman Martin raised concerns about the Pre-K Counts program's inability to provide pre-kindergarten programs due to a lack of available seats, despite funded but vacant seats, and suggested a system where funds are released only when a child is actually assigned to a slot. Brown explained the requirement to enter through a lead agency and noted the program's recovery to pre-pandemic enrollment levels. She cited that there are approximately 2,000 unfilled seats across the state. Chairman Martin asked if there is a process to reallocate unused seats to areas of need. Brown discussed the reallocation process during COVID-19 and said that since January 2024, PDE has been collecting detailed enrollment information and holding quarterly meetings to discuss enrollment and reallocation needs, stating that seats are not reallocated from providers with at least 80% enrollment, in accordance with Act 35 of 2023, and efforts are made to keep reallocated seats within the same county whenever possible.

Chairman Martin noted that Gov. Shapiro is asking for an increase in the per-seat rate paid to providers of the pre-K programs. He asked if they could not count the vacancy rate as new income toward the program for each seat not filled. Brown emphasized the importance of focusing on the cost per child rather than the cost of seats in child development programs, advocating for a system that supports ongoing wage increases and operational costs. Chairman Martin echoed this sentiment, highlighting the goal of creating a system that supports providers in increasing wages and covering program costs. He asked whether the shift from a slot model to a per-child model was confirmed. Brown discussed the challenges of funding child development programs, emphasizing the need to increase rates to raise salaries without relying on vacancy savings.

Chairman Martin discussed the significant increase in state funding for school districts, which has risen by 67% since 2015, leading to school districts accumulating almost \$6.8 billion in reserves. He questioned the necessity of raising property taxes and suggested the state might need to recommend guidelines for reserve amounts. Sec. Rowe explained that school districts typically maintain 8% to 10% in their fund balances, with a maximum of 8% allowed if they intend to raise taxes beyond the [Act 1 of 2022](#) limit, emphasizing the importance of these funds for facility planning and long-term needs. Sites cited a previous error regarding school funding, explaining that schools must have an 8% unassigned fund balance to increase taxes at all, not just above the Act 1 limit.

Chairman Martin asked whether a list of all the school district reserves by district is maintained. Sec. Rowe answered that the spreadsheet is already available on the website. Chairman Martin asked if school districts are provided with specific information based on the 2022 Annual Financial Report (AFR) data, to which Sec. Rowe responded that the current data available is for the 2022-2023 period and they are in the process of scrubbing the AFR data for the 2023-2024 period. Chairman Martin confirmed that they still possess the data provided to them. Sec. Rowe stated that the information requested is already available in the spreadsheets on the website. Chairman Martin asked if the list of total school district reserves by school district is included with the same data already provided and requested its provision if it is not. Sites confirmed that the information is included in the numbers provided.

Chairman Martin discussed the importance of child safety, referencing a case where a teacher charged with sex crimes continued teaching for months. He questioned the breakdown in the system that alerts school districts about such charges. Sec. Rowe explained that a notification was sent to the district about the teacher, but due to a system breakdown, the designated person at the district level did not receive it. She stated that the issue has been resolved after a study to fix the problem systemically.

Chairman Martin acknowledged that the notification issue has been resolved, ensuring that notifications will now be sent as expected. Sec. Rowe emphasized that resolving the notification issue is part of a broader approach to public safety, highlighting the importance of maintaining regular communication with police departments and solicitors. Chairman Martin asked whether any other serious cases were found that did not receive notification. Sec. Rowe explained that the issue of notification failures was addressed by identifying two potential sources of the problem and launching an information campaign advising districts to designate their superintendent for one of the notification-receiving roles.

Chairman Martin mentioned incidents reported through the Safe2Say program and questioned whether school officials are required to report such incidents to law enforcement and the child line. Sec. Rowe stated that educators are required to report suspected abuse through ChildLine under certain circumstances but said she was uncertain if this obligation applied to the specific incidents discussed. Chairman Martin asked if the Attorney General's office should have the authority to review the outcomes of "safe to say something" reports. Sec. Rowe expressed surprise upon learning that the Attorney General's office does not have access to the disposition tracker within the Safe2Say system and speculated that many superintendents might also be unaware of this limitation. Chairman Martin discussed the accountability intentions behind the Safe2Say program and the school safety and security grant program, emphasizing the need for a single point of entry for safety concerns. He discussed an upcoming review by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee.

Chairman Martin asked Sec. Rowe if Gov. Shapiro still supports the Pennsylvania Award for Student Success (PASS) lifeline scholarship program and its priority for implementation. Sec. Rowe responded by emphasizing the consideration of multiple educational pathways that wouldn't harm public school funding, indicating openness to the scholarship program. Chairman Martin then inquired if Gov. Shapiro's support for the program had waned, to which Sec. Rowe reiterated the importance of supporting multiple educational pathways without detracting from public school resources. Chairman Martin discussed the flexibility [Act 55 of 2022](#), provided to schools in fund allocation for improving proficiency in areas like math and reading. Sec. Rowe mentioned the Ready to Learn Block Grant in response to the question about Act 55.

Chairman Martin asked if PDE should have more authority over school districts failing to meet reading proficiency levels, suggesting stricter requirements. Sec. Rowe expressed interest in exploring this suggestion, noting the absence of such a directive but acknowledging its potential merit. Chairman Martin expressed a desire to set large educational goals for Pennsylvania, citing Mississippi's success in reading proficiency improvement and advocating for accountability in school performance and funding effectiveness. Sec. Rowe described the value of a child's education in Pennsylvania as "invaluable."

Chairman Martin highlighted the inequity in basic education funding across Pennsylvania, with disparities in per-child investment. Sec. Rowe responded that the basic education funding formula addresses equity issues. Chairman Martin pointed out the "hold harmless" provision as a significant issue in funding discussions. Sites discussed addressing inequities in school funding by examining variables and mentioned BEFC's efforts through Act 55 to mitigate year-over-year inequities.

Chairman Martin criticized the current school funding formulas for their complexity and lack of equity, advocating for a simpler, more equitable system. He linked the demand for school choice to a lack of accountability in public schools and emphasized the importance of addressing these issues for the development of Pennsylvania's children. Chairman Martin concluded by requesting the discussed information to be provided to the committee within 10 days and expressed his intention to work on simplifying the system and improving accountability.



### **House Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with Judiciary**

*02/26/25, 3:00 p.m., House Floor, Main Capitol*

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Pennsylvania Judiciary.

- The Pennsylvania Judiciary was represented by:
- The Honorable Christine Donohue, Justice, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania,
- The Honorable P. Kevin Brobson, Justice, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and
- Andrea B. Tuominen, Court Administrator of Pennsylvania.

Chairman Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia) welcomed attendees and asked testifiers to be sworn in before taking questions from the members of the committee.

Minority Chairman James Struzzi (R-Indiana) highlighted the governor's spending proposal for the judiciary at approximately \$509 million, marking a \$30 million or about 6.5% increase.

Justice Donohue introduced herself and her colleagues, including Justice Brobson and several others, emphasizing the importance of adequate funding for Pennsylvania's unified judicial system (UJS). She outlined three budgetary requests: a 7% General Fund increase, reauthorization of Act 49 and statutory amendments for the judicial computer system (JCS) augmentation account.

Rep. Emily Kinkead (D-Allegheny) inquired about the judiciary's budget-balancing measures during the period of flat funding from fiscal year 2016-2017 through 2023-2024. Justice Brobson explained the reliance on Act 49 funds to cover the appropriation gap and mentioned cost-saving measures, expressing optimism about the judiciary's financial direction aligning more closely with inflation adjustments. Rep. Kinkead further asked how tightening the budget impacts Pennsylvanians' access to justice. Justice Brobson stated that the court system managed to maintain access to justice without affecting service levels, emphasizing the importance of continuing Act 49 reauthorization. Rep. Kinkead also asked about the benefits of shifting judiciary funding from a fee-

based system to the general fund. Justice Donohue explained the fees are assessed on those who are least capable of paying the fees and regarded it as a “philosophical question,” members of the General Assembly discuss.

Rep. Marci Mustello (R-Butler) mentioned that discussions over the past six days have included the proposal for the legalization of adult-use marijuana, noting it as a common point of inquiry across all departments. Justice Brobson stated his opinion on the matter is not relevant as he does not have a vote. Rep. Mustello inquired about the potential financial savings for the courts if adult-use marijuana were legalized in Pennsylvania, emphasizing the governor's concern about the overburdening of the courts. Justice Donohue responded that she does not know the impact of legalizing adult-use marijuana on the court system due to the robustness of their computer system. Rep. Mustello further asked if legalizing it would help reduce the number of cases before the court. Justice Donohue explained that the impact would be most felt at the county level, including municipal courts, magisterial districts and the courts of Common Pleas, and she does not have detailed knowledge of the number of cases heard by the Supreme Court in this context. Justice Brobson mentioned that decriminalization would likely impact county probation and parole management caseloads. Rep. Mustello revealed that the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) were not consulted about the proposed legalization of marijuana by the governor and asked if the courts had been consulted. Justice Donohue specified that the Judiciary would not be involved in the development of marijuana legalization policy, stating it is a matter for the executive and legislative branches.

Rep. Anthony Bellmon (D-Philadelphia) mentioned a prior discussion with Philadelphia judges about judicial safety concerns and referenced the introduction and subsequent signing into law of [HB 1700](#), now Act 98 of 2024, which expands the definition of “endangerment” to include federal judges. He asked what further actions could be taken to enhance courthouse safety at the state and county levels. Tuominen suggested continued funding for UJS security, highlighting its use for education, facility assessments, incident reporting and grants for securing court facilities. She requested \$3 million for the next fiscal year to enhance security at various judicial levels. Rep. Bellmon asked if the 1,000 reported security incidents were occurrences in the courtroom or included emails from various locations. Tuominen described the types of incidents reported, including emails, threats via phone and incidents in court facilities, mentioning collaboration with local and state law enforcement for safety.

Rep. Jeff Olsommer (R-Wayne) inquired about the need for a 33% increase in funding for cybersecurity and disaster recovery within UJS, following a cyber-attack that targeted the judiciary network. Justice Brobson pointed out all three government branches experience cyber security threats and praised the information technology (IT) staff for defending the court security systems. Tuominen confirmed the allocation of additional personnel to enhance cybersecurity for the statewide case management systems and websites, specifically mentioning the UJS portal. She mentioned plans to bid for annual vulnerability and penetration testing, an upgrade from their two-decade practice, to improve security measures. She also said the funds will also be used to update end-of-life hardware in magisterial district courts and data centers.

Rep. Olsommer asked for an update on the operation of the new budget line, asking whether the computer systems are now safer than they were a year ago before the funding was implemented. Tuominen acknowledged the continuous efforts to enhance cybersecurity since the Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attack, emphasizing the implementation of a multi-layer defense system. She expressed significant concern over the cybersecurity levels in counties that manage IT functions for trial courts, highlighting incidents across the commonwealth that compromised court functionalities due to cyber-attacks. Rep. Olsommer acknowledged the complexities and high costs associated with cybersecurity, relating to his own experiences as a small business owner.

Rep. Steve Malagari (D-Montgomery) asked about the task force created by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) in 2022, focusing on issues affecting justice-involved individuals with autism and intellectual disabilities. Justice Donohue discussed the success of the “autisms in the court program,” crediting Justice Kevin Dougherty for its inception after his personal encounter with an autistic child in his courtroom. She highlighted the program's statewide implementation, the creation of quiet rooms and the collaboration with departments of human services across counties. Rep. Malagari emphasized the importance of understanding and acknowledging individuals with autism or intellectual disabilities, particularly in the justice system.

Rep. Marla Brown (R-Lawrence) highlighted her concern for the senior community, noting a 51% budget increase for the Office of Elder Justice in the courts. She asked for details on the office's work and the reason for the significant budget increase. Justice Donohue explained that the budget increase for the Office of Elder Justice is due to the end of federal funding for three staff members, covering personnel costs to continue educational efforts. She highlighted the guardianship tracking system in Pennsylvania, designed to ensure the elderly population's dignity in the court system.

Rep. Brown discussed her concerns about the closure of youth detention centers (YDCs) in her area and across the state, highlighting a specific case where a juvenile who brought a knife to school had to be sent home due to the lack of available facilities. She asked what measures are being taken to address the needs of the juvenile population affected by them. Justice Donohue explained that juveniles enter the court system due to issues beyond the court's control and emphasized that once in the system, they are treated with care, acknowledging the lack of family oversight as a common issue. Justice Brobson discussed the challenges judges face in making juvenile placement decisions, especially in counties with closed juvenile facilities. He emphasized the

importance of judges having good relationships with county commissioners to find solutions and opposed housing juvenile offenders with adult offenders.

Rep. Brown mentioned her county is taking in juveniles from other counties due to having room but expressed concern over the situation. Justice Brobson mentioned that some counties are transporting juveniles much farther than necessary, taking them away from their families and support systems, which he believes is not a good system. Rep. Brown mentioned that the issue of housing juveniles should be considered for the future budget.

Rep. Pat Gallagher (D-Philadelphia) asked about AOPC's role in expunging records for those incarcerated for cannabis possession offenses, as proposed in the governor's budget. Justice Brobson said the AOPC and Supreme Court are committed to implementing legislation related to Clean Slate records and will likely play a role in expunging records if it becomes law. He highlighted the technological and financial challenges involved and emphasized the importance of considering these factors in the legislation to ensure effective execution.

Rep. Charity Grimm Krupa (R-Fayette) expressed opposition to the legalization of adult-use recreational marijuana, citing concerns about potential increases in crime, traffic accidents and DUIs. She asked about the anticipated impact on Pennsylvania's judiciary caseload if marijuana were to be legalized. Justice Brobson explained that judges do not anticipate changes in their workload based on potential legislation, such as the legalization of adult-use marijuana. He mentioned that judges do not think in terms of their dockets decreasing by a certain percentage if such legislation passes. Rep. Krupa asked if the lack of a widely accepted roadside test for marijuana impairment might lead to an increase in litigation, specifically in cases involving omnibus pretrial motions and motions to suppress. Justice Brobson stated he could not answer the question about the impact of marijuana legislation on law enforcement and judicial processes, explaining that law enforcement might be able to address the question regarding the burden of testing and suppression hearings.

Rep. Krupa discussed the government's proposal for immediate expungement of records for those incarcerated for possession of small amounts of marijuana. She inquired if there had been any discussion about pardons in these cases. Justice Donohue mentioned that they have not discussed any aspect of the expungement and pardon issue, as it is still in the formative stages at the legislative level. Rep. Krupa asked if the legalization of marijuana would impact child custody and welfare cases, particularly in situations where one parent uses marijuana recreationally. She inquired whether courts would need to develop new standards to determine when such use is problematic. Justice Donohue said she didn't believe a new standard would be needed, but rather keep the same test, which determines the best interest of the child.

Rep. Krupa asked whether the legalization of marijuana would lead to an increase in landlord-tenant disputes, especially in federally assisted rental properties, due to marijuana's illegal federal status. Justice Brobson responded that while there are potential collateral consequences to legalizing adult-use recreational marijuana, it's a matter for the General Assembly and the governor to discuss and agree upon, noting that courts deal with collateral consequences as they arise.

Rep. Justin Fleming (D-Dauphin) highlighted the history of treatment courts in Pennsylvania, starting with the first adult drug court program in Philadelphia in 1997, and asked the justices to elaborate on the successes of these courts. Justice Brobson praised the work of treatment courts, mentioning the Supreme Court's investment in these initiatives and the recent establishment of a regional Veterans Treatment Court in several counties. He also discussed the upcoming rollout of a certification program through All Rise to further support treatment courts. Rep. Fleming praised the efforts and offered the services of the General Assembly to assist the courts further.

Rep. Josh Kail (R-Beaver) noted a \$1 million increase in the budget for Pennsylvania Justice Network (JNET), representing a 40% increase, and asked what the additional funds would be used for. Justice Donohue explained that the increase is intended to cover the actual costs associated with JNET's continued operation. Rep. Kail asked if the commonwealth has not been covering the cost of JNET. Justice Brobson explained that this year's budget presents the actual operational costs of JNET to the General Assembly, aiming for transparency. Tuominen mentioned that funding for JNET was previously divided between the JCS augmentation account and a new line item, with a request for full funding through this new line item. Rep. Kail inquired about the justices' opinions on merit-based selection for state Supreme Court justices. Justice Donohue shared her "educated" opinion, noting that citizens seem to prefer electing judges, referencing the narrow defeat of a constitutional amendment for merit selection in 1968 and ongoing discussions since 1952. She observed that the electorate has successfully chosen judges and justices of merit and contrasted the state's election system with the federal system's political selection.

Rep. Tarik Khan (D-Philadelphia) highlighted his background as a nurse practitioner and his view of substance use as a health care issue, not a criminal one. He mentioned working on a bipartisan bill with Rep. Jamie Flick (R-Lycoming) to promote peer support services for recovery from substance use and asked about the effectiveness and potential expansion of drug courts in Pennsylvania to support recovery without incarceration. Justice Brobson expressed strong support for Pennsylvania's drug courts, emphasizing treatment over incarceration for individuals with substance use issues. He highlighted the role of certified peer specialists and

mentorship in the treatment court model and mentioned the Supreme Court's investment in certifying best practices and efforts to expand drug, DUI and veterans' courts. He also suggested collaboration between various stakeholders for early intervention to prevent individuals with addiction from entering the criminal justice system.

Rep. Thomas Kutz (R-Cumberland) revisited concerns about the locations for the bar exam administration, highlighting the financial burden on candidates, and inquired about the possibility of adjusting the fee structure or adding additional sites to alleviate these burdens. Justice Donohue acknowledged the concerns about the cost and location of the bar exam, expressing openness to exploring a more centrally located exam site in Pennsylvania and suggesting consultation with the Board of Law Examiners on this matter. Justice Brobson discussed the challenges related to the location and costs of administering the bar examination, mentioning his personal experience and the difficulties in finding a central Pennsylvania facility that meets the necessary security and IT requirements for an increasingly online exam.

Rep. Kutz emphasized the importance of having a reliable computer system for the bar examination and expressed concern about the security at Magisterial District Judge (MDJ) offices, highlighting the close proximity of victims and alleged perpetrators and the limitations of measures like bulletproof glass in preventing people from entering through the lobby. Justice Brobson was going to refer to Tuominen but said the counties are responsible for the space and security.

Rep. Paul Friel (D-Chester) asked about the number of mental health court district courts in Pennsylvania and whether they have sufficient resources. Justice Brobson acknowledged the lack of sufficient resources for mental health courts in Pennsylvania and committed to advocating for increased funding. Rep. Friel suggested that investing in resources early in the judicial process would be cost-effective. Tuominen mentioned there are 30 adult mental health courts and one juvenile mental health court in operation and discussed AOPC's behavioral health initiative aimed at enhancing the response to the national behavioral health crisis. Rep. Friel expressed interest in the findings of the behavioral health initiative.

Rep. Eric Nelson (R-Westmoreland) emphasized the need for more priority on upstream mental health prevention in the budget and discussed the issue of judicial efficiency and the backlog in mental health evaluations in Westmoreland County's prisons. Tuominen mentioned the importance of establishing competency dockets to reduce lag time in evaluating an individual's competency for restoration. Rep. Nelson asked if the current budget includes funds for increasing forensic beds and evaluations. Justice Brobson explained that their budget does not cover the costs associated with addressing the backlog in competency evaluations, as this falls outside their purview. Justice Donohue stated that the judges on the Court of Common Pleas are efficient and not the cause of any holdups, emphasizing that the issue lies elsewhere and needs urgent attention.

Rep. Torren Ecker (R-Adams) asked about a \$1.5 million appropriation for the rules committee and its role, particularly in relation to the committee's decision-making process and the court's autonomy. Justice Donohue explained that the Supreme Court oversees multiple rules committees, which are essential for updating the Rules of Procedure in response to new legislation or issues. She further explained that these committees, composed of appointed lawyers and internal staff, meet around six times a year and the \$1.5 million supports the necessary personnel for this process.

Rep. Ecker inquired about the process for promulgating rules within the court system, emphasizing the importance of public input. Justice Donohue detailed that rule proposals undergo a minimum 30-day public comment period, with the possibility of additional rounds of comments based on feedback, highlighting the iterative nature of their rulemaking process. Rep. Ecker further asked if the Supreme Court follows the same public comment process for existing rules under review. Justice Donohue said that an existing rule remains unchanged unless a modification proposal is received, which then undergoes review by the committee.

Rep. Ecker questioned whether the Supreme Court has explored ways to use taxpayer money more efficiently, similar to the governor's agencies. Justice Donohue responded that the court has operated with a lean budget for years, mentioning the realignment of magistrate districts and the reduction of hours for senior judges at the courts of common pleas as examples of their efforts to manage resources efficiently.

Rep. Kinkead expressed interest in discussing Continuing Judicial Education (CJE) programs, particularly regarding how they address known biases within the justice system. Justice Donohue mentioned that the judiciary conducts seminars, including bias sensitivity training, and highlighted the participation of common pleas court judges and Supreme Court justices in CJE programs, noting that the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) board actively trains on bias sensitivities.

Rep. Kinkead asked about moving cases through the juvenile justice system faster. Justice Brobson discussed the cooperative effort required to address juvenile decertification and the importance of swift justice, acknowledging the complexity of criminal dockets and the factors contributing to delays, such as funding and mental health evaluations. He emphasized the court's commitment to preventing juveniles from unnecessarily remaining in adult facilities and ensuring quick responses to decertification matters. Rep. Kinkead suggested that the legislature should provide more resources to expedite processes like mental health

evaluations. Justice Brobson agreed on the importance of legislative support for juvenile justice issues and highlighted the court's role in juvenile justice, suggesting that adjustments should be made through legislation.

Rep. Krupa asked about the expected continuation of the downward trend in fee revenue from court fees, including those established by Act 49 of 2009, which fund UJS's operations. Justice Brobson discussed the funding from Act 49, mentioning the judiciary's preference to not depend on the fluctuating fee structure and the difficulty in predicting funding stability. Rep. Krupa asked for clarification on who is required to pay the fees that fund UJS. Justice Brobson explained that the fees are collected from individuals accessing the justice system and are collected across various civil cases, ranging from traffic citations to tenant disputes.

Rep. Krupa asked about the comparison between Pennsylvania and other states regarding the percentage of judiciary funding that comes from fees versus state appropriations. Tuominen shared that Arkansas's JCS was initially funded entirely by fees, which proved unsustainable, leading to a transition to a system funded by state appropriations. Rep. Krupa asked for clarification on the accounts used for reimbursing judiciary salaries and expenses, specifically if they cover all expenses for travel, food and lodging for the Commonwealth Court, Superior Court and Justices account, and asked if they are subject to "right to know" requests. Tuominen confirmed that no travel-related expenditures for the three appellate courts come from the three line items designated for those courts and confirmed that all judiciary expenses are subject to the right-to-know request.

Chairman Struzzi inquired about the funding of cybersecurity projects and programs for lower-level courts, highlighting concerns at the county level. Tuominen explained that cybersecurity protections for county-based systems are contracted and funded by county governments. Chairman Struzzi asked if there was money in the budget to allow counties to upgrade their systems. Tuominen discussed the focus on statewide cybersecurity systems and mentioned attending a cybersecurity summit with IT staff to address concerns about local court protections. She highlighted the development of a model by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) with federal partners to support local cybersecurity efforts, including funding and tabletop exercises for incident response preparedness.

Chairman Struzzi acknowledged the financial challenges local budgets face in implementing necessary security measures and highlighted the effectiveness of problem-solving courts in addressing crimes linked to mental health and substance abuse issues. He noted the lack of additional funding for these initiatives but voiced support for increased future investment.

Chairman Harris inquired about the progress of sealing criminal records under the Clean Slate Act, expressing disappointment over the low number of drug felonies sealed and asking about the reasons for the slowdown and what is needed to expedite the process. Justice Brobson acknowledged concerns about the low number of individuals taking advantage of the Clean Slate programs and mentioned working closely with PSP to implement changes. Chairman Harris mentioned that since the implementation of Clean Slate in 2018, approximately 55 million cases have been sealed and asked if the attendees would commit to meeting to discuss how to ensure Clean Slate 3.0 is as effective as the first two iterations. Justice Donohue agreed to meet with Chairman Harris and the advocates to discuss the implementation and improvement of the Clean Slate initiatives.

Chairman Harris asked about the proportion of the budget that is generated from fees. Justice Brobson explained that 11% of their overall operating budget is fee-based and highlighted the financial challenge of fee generation not keeping pace with the line item appropriations set by the General Assembly. Chairman Harris inquired about the breakdown of fees contributing to the 11% of the budget and expressed concern about the court system's budget being partially funded by fees from the adjudication of cases. He suggested that the court system should be fully funded independently to avoid conflict of interest. Tuominen said her staff can provide the specifics for Chairman Harris. Justice Brobson agreed with Chairman Harris on the problematic nature of funding the court system through adjudication fees and highlighted the need for Act 41 to be reauthorized. He mentioned that the judiciary's budget, especially for critical computer systems, is not being met by the current fee structures and supported the idea of removing the judiciary's reliance on fee structures.

Chairman Harris asked the justices about a "perfect world" scenario where fees would be removed from the budget and to be replaced with straight allocations. Justice Brobson agreed with the idea of a "perfect world" scenario where the judiciary would prefer a flat-line appropriation for the JCS and the 11% mentioned, allowing the fees to be managed separately. He emphasized that the General Assembly is aware of their financial needs but highlighted the challenge of fluctuating numbers due to external factors. He also expressed a preference for stable funding over the unpredictable nature of fee-based funding.

Chairman Harris expressed interest in seeing a breakdown of the costs associated with removing filing fees, acknowledging the potential access to justice issues for those unable to afford them. He agreed on the importance of fully funding the judiciary to eliminate reliance on such fees.



## Bullet.in.Points

### PDE: AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

The Department of Education's Division of Adult Education announced the availability of approximately \$3.615 million in grant funds to be awarded under the Pennsylvania Adult and Family Literacy Education Act for family literacy direct service. Additional information will be posted on the division's [website](#). Additional information is available on the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

## Cosponsor Memos

### HCO1583 - Tuition Increase Transparency Legislation

#### Sponsor

Rep. Joe Emrick (R)

#### Summary

Requires institutions of higher education to notify students in advance if they plan to increase tuition from the previous academic year.

#### Intro Date

02/18/2025

#### Last Action

02/27/2025 H - Introduced HB770

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### HCO1640 - Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner Pilot Program

#### Sponsor

Rep. Arvind Venkat (D)

#### Summary

Creates a certified registered nurse practitioner pilot program to allow CRNPs to practice as independent practitioners in health professional shortage areas only.

#### Intro Date

02/21/2025

#### Last Action

02/21/2025 H - Cosponsor memo filed

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## HCO1664 - Providing Opportunities to Serve in National Guard through Targeted Incentive

### Sponsor

Rep. Chris Pielli (D)

### Summary

Expands the partial tuition reimbursement program to cover enlistment in the Guard by U.S. Army JAG officers and chaplains, as well as fine-tuning the current list of eligible medical or health officers.

### Intro Date

02/25/2025

### Last Action

02/25/2025 H - Cosponsor memo filed

## Basic Ed Bill Actions

**HB687 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in school directors, providing for ineligibility for office of school director for delinquent tax obligations.**

### Sponsor

Rep. Dan Moul (R)

### Summary

(PN 703) Amends the Public School Code, in school directors, adding a section to provide for ineligibility for office of school director for delinquent tax obligations. Allows an objection to the candidacy of an individual for office of school director who is not eligible for office of school director as specified to be presented to the court under subdivision (c) of Article IX of the Pennsylvania Election Code. Permits an objection to the title of office of school director for an individual who is not eligible for office of school director as specified to be tried by proceedings of quo warranto as provided by law. Applies this section to a candidate for the office of school director and to an individual elected to the office of school director on and after the effective date. Provides definitions. Effective in 60 days.

### Intro Date

02/20/2025

### Actions

02/20/2025 H - Introduced

02/21/2025 H - Referred to - House Education

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**HB688 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in charter schools, providing for cyber charter school moratorium.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Tarah Probst (D)

**Summary**

(PN 704) Amends the Public School Code, in charter schools, providing for a cyber charter school moratorium beginning July 1, 2025, and continuing through June 30, 2038. Effective immediately.

**Intro Date**

02/20/2025

**Actions**

02/20/2025 H - Introduced

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02/21/2025 H - Referred to - House Education

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**HB725 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in pupils and attendance, further providing for extended special education enrollment due to COVID-19.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Joe Webster (D)

**Intro Date**

02/24/2025

**Actions**

02/24/2025 H - Introduced

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02/25/2025 H - Referred to - House Education

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**HB726 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, providing for capital investment needs.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Joe Webster (D)

**Intro Date**

02/24/2025

**Actions**

02/24/2025 H - Introduced

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**HB727 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in preliminary provisions, further providing for definitions, for Keystone Exams and graduation requirements and for special provisions applicable to the Keystone Exams, graduation requirements and alternative competency assessment; in district superintendents and assistant district superintendents, further providing for performance review; in professional employees, further providing for definitions; in pupils and attendance, further providing for assisting students experiencing education instability; in E-chievement Program, further providing for definitions; and, in educational tax credits, further providing for definitions.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Joe Webster (D)

**Intro Date**

02/24/2025

**Actions**

02/24/2025 H - Introduced

02/25/2025 H - Referred to - House Education

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**HB748 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in terms and courses of study, providing for litterbug education.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Milou Mackenzie (R)

**Intro Date**

02/26/2025

**Actions**

02/26/2025 H - Introduced

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**HB752 - An Act amending Titles 18 (Crimes and Offenses) and 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in falsification and intimidation, further providing for failure to comply with 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 97 Subch. I registration requirements; and, in sentencing, further providing for registration.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Jeremy Shaffer (R)

**Intro Date**

02/26/2025

**Actions**

02/26/2025 H - Introduced

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**HR92 - A Resolution directing the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a comprehensive study of the viability, benefits and costs of establishing consolidated, county-led busing of all private and public school students.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Joe Webster (D)

**Summary**

(PN 752) Resolution directing the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a comprehensive study of the viability, benefits and costs of establishing consolidated, county-led busing of all private and public school students.

**Intro Date**

02/24/2025

**Actions**

02/24/2025 H - Introduced

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02/25/2025 H - Referred to - House Education

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**SB280 - An Act to provide appropriations from the General Fund for the expenses of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Departments of the Commonwealth, the public debt and the public schools for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide appropriations from special funds and accounts to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; to provide for the appropriation of Federal funds to the Executive and Judicial Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, and for the payment of bills remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025; and to provide for the additional appropriation of Federal and State funds to the Executive and Legislative Departments for the fiscal year July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, and for the payment of bills incurred and remaining unpaid at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.**

**Sponsor**

Sen. Vincent J. Hughes (D)

**Intro Date**

02/26/2025

**Actions**

02/26/2025 S - Introduced

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02/26/2025 S - Referred to - Senate Appropriations

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**SB304 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, providing for military education scholarship account; and imposing penalties.**

**Sponsor**

Sen. Doug Mastriano (R)

**Intro Date**

02/25/2025

**Actions**

02/25/2025 S - Introduced

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02/25/2025 S - Referred to - Senate Education

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**SB315 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in career and technical education, further providing for career and technical education equipment grants.**

**Sponsor**

Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R)

**Intro Date**

02/26/2025

**Actions**

02/26/2025 S - Introduced

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02/26/2025 S - Referred to - Senate Education

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**SB354 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in charter schools, further providing for funding for charter schools, for provisions applicable to charter schools and for applicability of other provisions of this act and of other acts and regulations.**

**Sponsor**

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R)

**Intro Date**

02/26/2025

**Actions**

02/26/2025 S - Introduced

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02/26/2025 S - Referred to - Senate Education

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**SB378 - An Act amending Title 24 (Education) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in preliminary provisions, providing for student data privacy and protection; conferring powers and imposing duties on the Department of Education; and imposing penalties.**

**Sponsor**

Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R)

**Intro Date**

02/26/2025

**Actions**

02/26/2025 S - Introduced

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02/26/2025 S - Referred to - Senate Education

### **Higher Ed Bill Actions**

**HB727 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in preliminary provisions, further providing for definitions, for Keystone Exams and graduation requirements and for special provisions applicable to the Keystone Exams, graduation requirements and alternative competency assessment; in district superintendents and assistant district superintendents, further providing for performance review; in professional employees, further providing for definitions; in pupils and attendance, further providing for assisting students experiencing education instability; in E-chievement Program, further providing for definitions; and, in educational tax credits, further providing for definitions.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Joe Webster (D)

**Intro Date**

02/24/2025

**Actions**

02/24/2025 H - Introduced

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02/25/2025 H - Referred to - House Education

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**HB770 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in higher education accountability and transparency, providing for notice of tuition increase.**

**Sponsor**

Rep. Joe Emrick (R)

**Intro Date**

02/24/2025

## Actions

02/24/2025 H - Introduced

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02/25/2025 H - Referred to - House Education

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**SB304 - An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, providing for military education scholarship account; and imposing penalties.**

## Sponsor

Sen. Doug Mastriano (R)

## Intro Date

02/25/2025

## Actions

02/25/2025 S - Introduced

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02/25/2025 S - Referred to - Senate Education

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**SB330 - An Act amending the act of July 2, 2019 (P.L.366, No.56), known as the Sports Raffle Charities Act, further providing for athletic event drawing.**

## Sponsor

Sen. Michele Brooks (R)

## Summary

(PN 287) Amends the Sports Raffle Charities Act, further providing for athletic event drawing to specify that the other 50% of the total amount collected from the sale of athletic event drawing tickets shall be donated by each affiliated nonprofit organization conducting an athletic event drawing as follows: 95% shall be donated within seven days from the date of the drawing to one or more designated charitable organizations and 5% shall be used to fund grants issued by the Office of State Fire Commissioner under 35 Pa.C.S. Ch. 78 Subchs. B (relating to Fire Company Grant Program) and C (relating to Emergency Medical Services Grant Program). Directs an affiliated nonprofit organization to remit the amount collected in the prior year to the Department of Revenue (DOR) beginning on the first June 30 one year after the effective date and each June 30 thereafter. Requires DOR to report the amount remitted to the State Treasurer and the State Treasurer to transfer the amount to a restricted revenue account within the General Fund to fund grants issued by the Office of State Fire Commissioner. Directs the affiliated nonprofit organization to compile a report on the ticket sales for DOR and the appropriate committees in the House and Senate. Effective in 30 days.

## Intro Date

02/26/2025

## Actions

02/26/2025 S - Introduced

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02/26/2025 S - Referred to - Senate Community, Economic and Recreational Development

## Upcoming Events

### **THURSDAY – 03/06/2025**

#### **9:30 AM, [Senate Appropriations](#)**

*Budget Hearing, Hearing Room 1, North Office Building*

Budget hearing with the Governor's Budget Office/Executive Offices

#### **11:00 AM, [House Democratic Policy](#)**

*Public Hearing, The Conference Center at IU13, 1020 New Holland Ave., Lancaster*

Public hearing on pre-K education and its impact on K-12.

#### **1:00 PM, [House Appropriations](#)**

*Budget Hearing, House Floor*

Budget hearing with the Governor's Office of the Budget/Executive Offices

### **TUESDAY – 03/25/2025**

11:30 AM, PMEA Music Education Advocacy Day Press Conference

*Press Conference*

PMEA Music Education Advocacy Day celebrates music education in Pennsylvania.

## In the News

[02/21/2025 - PSERS Announces the Retirement of Executive Director Terrill J. Sanchez](#)

[02/21/2025 - Auditor General DeFoor: Greencastle-Antrim School District is Preparing Students for Future Financial Success](#)

[02/21/2025 - Hogan Appointed Ranking Vice Chair of Children and Youth Committee](#)

[02/21/2025 - Joint State Government Commission \(JSGC\): INFORMATION DISCLOSURE OF THE STATE-RELATED UNIVERSITIES - February 2025](#)

[02/21/2025 - Joint State Government Commission \(JSGC\): INSTRUCTIONAL OUTPUT AND FACULTY SALARY COSTS OF THE STATE-RELATED UNIVERSITIES - February 2025](#)

[02/24/2025 - PIAA Updates Policy to Protect Girls' Sports - Statement from Independence Law Center](#)

[02/25/2025 - Governor Shapiro Provides Update on the Impacts of the Federal Funding Freeze; All Federal Funding Identified at the Filing of Lawsuit Unfrozen](#)

[02/25/2025 - PDE: Shapiro Administration Urges Organizations to Sponsor Summer Meals Program, Ensuring Year-Round Access to Nutritious Food for Children](#)

[02/25/2025 - AG Sunday: Teens from Cumberland Valley High School Take Pennsylvania State LifeSmarts Title](#)

[02/25/2025 - First Lady Lori Shapiro and the Governor's Advisory Commission on Next Generation Engagement Visit Tunkhannock Area High School in Wyoming County to See How State Funding Is Helping Provide Free Menstrual Products in K-12 Schools](#)

[02/26/2025 - The Future of Geothermal in Pennsylvania: Rapid Scale of Geothermal Energy Could Propel Commonwealth's Energy Industry to New Heights](#)

[02/26/2025 - WATCH: Pennsylvania Child Care Worker Supports Workforce Investments in Governor Shapiro's Proposed Budget to Attract and Retain Child Care Workers](#)

[02/26/2025 - Key Points from Senate Budget Hearing with Department of Education](#)

[02/27/2025 - Pennsylvania Launches Family Ambassador Pilot Program to Support Transition from Preschool Early Intervention to Kindergarten](#)

Education Recap is a comprehensive weekly report on legislative and executive actions on education related legislation in the Pennsylvania Capitol and is compiled and edited by PLS.

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